



Violation Documentation Centre – 2013

Report on the Recent Events Witnessed in Tal Abyad-Al Raqqa

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July 2013



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Introduction

Violation Documentation Center in Syria delivers this report apart from any political background with a mere legal and documentary approach. **VDC** tries to be extremely accurate and cautious about mentioning the details and the terms that have any connotations that incite violence or hatred, depending on several testimonies of eyewitnesses, activists and prominent figures of the city who were present during the current events or were directly informed by the ongoing events, disturbances and clashes between the conflicting parties. Some refrain from mentioning their real names, fearing of their lives; others preferred to mention their real ones.

Events Background

What happened in the city of Ras al-Ain / Seri Kaneih in Hasakah Governorate on **15th** and **16th** July **2013** resulting in clashes between the so-called " People's Protection Forces **YPG**" on the one hand and "Al Nusra Front " on the other hand was the direct cause of events in the city of Tal-Abyad, added to that the information reported in the media about the Kurdish constitution to be adopted and implemented by the Democratic Union Party **PYD**, and some of the characters and forces supporting the party in question. All of this was one of the main reasons for the occurrence of what happened; as the city has witnessed in recent days turbulences and violent clashes between " People's Protection Forces **YPG**", the military wing of the Democratic Union Party **PYD** and a brigade of Kurds Front on the one hand, members of Al "Nusra Front" and (the Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant "Daash"), and a number of battalions of the **FSA**, on the other hand, which led to a mass exodus of hundreds of Kurdish families after being ordered to leave the city in anticipation of any possible clashes to come.

About Tal Abyad

Tal Abyad is one of the most important areas in Al Raqqa Governorate with its border crossing with Turkey and its plain fertile land rich in springs. It is named after an ancient hill close to it. The cities of Tal Abyad, Eye of Jesus District, Slouk, and more than eighty other villages are all administrative parts of it. It is 100km north from the center of Al Raqqa, opposing the Turkish city of (Oakjqla), which is linked with by Tal Abyad border crossing. Tal Abyad is a city rich in ethnic and racial diversity where Kurds and Arabs live together, in addition to the Armenians and Turkmen. The Kurds consist **55%** of the city population, **30%** of Tal Abyad's population, and about **15%** of the total population of Al Raqqa Governorate, according to the General Coordinator of the Local Council in Al Raqqa.



Report Methodology

The sources of the report based on statements, testimonies and eyewitnesses who were either part of the event, or in direct contact with persons affected by the event, taking into account the objective conditions to produce a report characterized by simplicity on the one hand, and objectivity and monitoring of the actuality of the violations committed by all parties on the other hand.

Challenges and Difficulties

Attempts to get authentic numbers about the nature of violations committed were extremely difficult due to the great security risk, the deteriorating security condition in the region, and the personal danger on all who tried or tries to report and film the events on the ground.

The second challenge lies in the continuity of events until the time of writing the report, and the control of one party of the conflict on the scene now, which made it impossible to obtain any detailed figures, particularly in relation to the number of Kurds houses that have been robbed , plundered, or blown up and destroyed, or the number of shops that were looted after a short period of robbing civilian houses, or even the actual numbers of detainees in addition to those who were taken hostages.

* * * *



Events According to Eye Witnesses- Testimonies:

1)) First Testimony

Mr. **Ibraheem Muslim Muslim-33** years, a political activist and the General Coordinator of the Local Council in Al Raqqa says:

After the withdrawal of the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant," and "Al Nusra Front " from the city of Ras al-Ain / Sri Canet in Hasakah Governorate, following bloody clashes that killed about 35 fighters from Al Nusra Front, according to sources from inside the front itself, and a number of fighters of Peoples Protection Forces YPG of the Democratic Union Party PYD as members of the "Islamic state in Iraq and the Levant" arrested a young man and woman in the city of Ras al-Ain because they were "not fasting" during the month of Ramadan, and as people do not distinguish much between the different battalions they- the people- have attacked the headquarters of Al Nusra front thinking that they are the same entity which arrested the young man and the girl. That led to confrontations and battles resulted in the withdrawal of all fighting battalions from the city, and Peoples Protection Forces YPG" imposed their actual authority upon the whole city between **15th and 16th July 2013**.

After the Brigades of the Islamic State and Al Nusra front went back to the Governorate of Al Raqqa, specifically to the city of Tal Abyad, they began a series of punitive and provocative practices against the Syrian Kurdish citizens, as they arrested many young Kurdish simply because they are of Kurdish nationalism. They also prevented buses coming from Afrin from going to or coming from the city of Ras al-Ain / Sri Canet.

Kurdish battalions proclaimed in the city, including that of "Circo Ayoub" ,a close battalion to the "Peoples Protection Forces YPG" tried to protect areas with a Kurdish majority, especially on the day after **17/07/2013** when members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria intervened upon Kurdish events in the city asking people to pledge allegiance to the planned Islamic "Emirate"

Certainly, all events rejected the idea, including the parties of the Kurdish National Council such as "Azadi" and " Yeketi " parties. Consequently, the situation continues until **20.07.2013**, when members of the so-called Peoples Protection forces YPG arrested the Emir of the Islamic State "Khalaf Thiyab/Abu Musab" with four others after they have accused the Emir of trying to blow himself in one of the " houses of the people - money all "- a sub-offices of the Democratic Union Party PYD that was established- as claimed- to run citizens' affairs, in the village of" Yabseh " about 4km west from Tal Abyad city.

On the same day, many members "Daash"; an acronym for the name of "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" came to one of the headquarters of Peoples protection Forces YPG and asked for the release of their leader. Then, before breakfast time, minor clashes happened between the two



parties, two of the members of the "Daash" killed, many injured, then they all went back. On their way back, they detained the Kurdish citizen (Khalil Othman Khalil) of Tal Akhdar village in addition to his wife, in order to exchange them later for prisoners taken by Peoples Protection Forces YPG. After long negotiations, the wife was released while Khalil was kept retained.

Soon, clashes violently renewed that day in the evening with the use of variable heavy weapons, including heavy artillery, especially in the village of "Yabseh" and Al Layl alley, which are areas inhabited mainly by Kurdish. clashes continued until the morning of **21** - 7-2013 when residents of the city, specifically those of Al Layl alley woke up at about six in the morning to the sounds of minarets of mosques calling to evacuate the neighborhood because it would be bombed ten minutes later. This pushed hundreds to flee the neighborhood; while leaving, they were astonished that one of the barriers in the middle of the city of Tal Abyad was detaining all males from all ages and leaving women. More than **1,000** men and youths got detained then to unable them pressurize the members of the Democratic Union Party PYD so they release the Emir of group and his fighters. The battalions that participated in this were:

Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; that arrested more than 400 Kurdish citizens.

Ahrar Al Sham Brigades, which arrested more than 100 detainees.

Al Sakhana Brigades, an Islamist battalion was rumored to be linked to the Syrian regime, yet, later on they joined al-Farouq Brigades and then Ahrar Al-Sham Brigades and they arrested about 30 Kurdish citizens.

Indeed, in the evening there has been an exchange of the majority of the detainees with the Emir of the State, which was released after negotiations. Meanwhile, between the process of detention and the release, dozens of houses of Kurdish citizens, who had already left, were raided and all of the contents of furniture, money and other stuff were stolen..... later, the clashes began violently between the conflicting parties after exchanging accusations again, especially on 22/07/2013. Afterwards, areas of Kurdish majority were targeted by tanks, specifically the villages of Yabseh, Tal Fender and Korahsat, which resulted in a collective exodus of hundreds of Kurdish citizens in the evening that lasted until midnight.

On **23/07/2013** forces of the Syrian regime shelled the village of Al Sekkariah by warplanes; the village from which Kurdish areas were being shelled, and then forces from the Free Syrian Army came to support the fighting battalions, which increased ferocity of the clashes, thus it was said that many of the two parties were either dead or wounded. Additionally, dozens got arrested, especially by Peoples Protection Forces YPG and Circo Ayoub's battalion.

End of Testimony



2)) **Second Testimony:**

The lawyer, **Mr.A Abu Hameed**, 35 years, says:

The city was boiling, that is; there was militarization of the state of boiling, especially after news spread that the adoption of a Kurdish Constitution government was approaching, as well as the composition of special Kurds autonomy that paves the way for the establishment of a Kurdish state, and seeks to divide Syria.

Events started actually after two fighters of "the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" were shot and others were wounded by members of the Kurdistan Workers Party PKK, as the bullets were shot from the alley of Al layl that has a Kurdish majority. That was the straw that broke the camel's back; the clashes began and resulted numbers of dead, wounded and displaced.

The day the Emir of "Daash" called "Khalaf Thiyab/ Abu Musab" got arrested, the city continuously witnessed turbulences. It all started by killing two Arabs - as I said – by members of the BKK Party, and then violent clashes started at midnight and lasted until morning. At about five o'clock in the morning, mosques of Al layl alley called on Kurds to leave the alley, and that fire will be opened unless they immediately respond. Of course, Kurds did not leave alone, as many Arab and Turkmen families also left. Even some Arab families helped some Kurdish families to come out to remain safe, and I remember one of them, a member of Ahrar al-Sham Islamic battalions, was helping a Kurdish family out of the neighborhood.

Clashes went fiercer when the so-called sleeping cells that consist of members of Kurdistan Workers Party PKK were waken up in the city, who battled throughout the night with members of the Front and the Islamic State. What made it worse is that when the clashes continued in the village of Sekkariéh of Arab majority, that is considered the front line between the Arab fighters on the one hand and members of the Democratic Union Party PYD on the other hand, the Syrian regime's military aircrafts were shelling the strongholds of Arab fighters who were in direct clashes with BKK forces.

During the evacuation of neighborhoods, agents of the Front and the State arrested hundreds of Kurds and used them as hostages, in order to exchange them with the kidnapped Emir and a number of members that were with him. Afterwards, most of them were released but about 60 detainees, all suspected to have relations with PKK. Shops have not been looted, whereas the stealing of houses were carried out by some mob members during the search for weapons i.e. not systematic robbery. Most of the Arab citizens denounced the bombing on the houses of the Kurds, and as for the Turkish government, it neither bring any tanks nor did it open the border crossing, however, it was opened only to bring in relief supplies.... and most of the killings were from the Arab side "battalions and fighters" as at least 25 people were killed by Kurdish forces.

End of Testimony



3)) **third Testimony:**

The activist **Sabat Taher**, a website reporter, says:

After the arrest of the Emir of the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" with four members of the same organization, by the Peoples Protection Forces YPG, tension increased significantly in the city and dozens of rumors spread, and soon violent clashes began between the military parties in the city, namely:

Peoples Protection Forces YPG of the Democratic Union Party PYD and the Brigade of Circo Ayoub on one hand, and members of "Daash", Al Nusra Front, and three battalions internalized within the FSA: the battalion of Sheikh al-Islam, the battalion of Sawa'ek Al Rahman and the battalion of Walid Al Sakhee coming from Sukhna district, while some other battalions of the Free Syrian Army took a neutral stance.

On the night of 20.07.2013, a delegation of distinguished Arab figures headed- at about one o'clock at night- for the Democratic Union Party PYD to begin negotiations. According to a member of the delegation, they waited for more than two hours there, when the Kurds refused meeting them, so they went back. However, the clashes continued until about six in the morning when they asked us through the loudspeakers of mosques to evacuate our homes; they were saying "You Kurds, you have ten minutes to get out of the city", then they said that they were addressing civilians so they wouldn't be victims of clashes and that they did not have any disagreements with the civilians, but our dispute is with the Democratic Union Party PYD.....

Immediately, hundreds of Kurdish citizens left homes, but they were surprised by the presence of a great barrier at the city center, specifically at the Mosque of Ali Bin Abi Talib that began arresting all the men and youths, while all the entrances to the city were closed, which made the citizens realize that it was an ambush. Later on we knew that they do so to exchange the Kurds, estimated by 1000 detainees, with the Emir of "Daash" and the four people who were with him.

On the same day, negotiations took place directly between the Brigade of Kurds Front led by "Ala'a Ismail Shkho" and the battalions that detained the people, but they fouled him, arrested him and took his weapon. Several sides continued negotiations till the majority of Kurds detainees were released, one of which was my brother whom they arrested, too.



On 23/07/2013, many Kurds houses were raided in search of their youths on charges of cooperation with the Democratic Union Party PYD. On the 24th there was relative calm, the sound of shooting was heard sporadically, but this did not last much as "people's House - money all" got exploded with three houses nearby. Additionally, dozens of houses of the Kurdish citizens who had already left, specifically by the battalion coming from Sakhana District, known as "Sakhana Battalion", then they distributed a statement saying that every person who has a relation with the Democratic Union Party PYD would be dead, and addressed the citizens that they are brothers with the Kurds, and that the main problem is with the members of the party in question. However, it was just hearsay and their actions were quite different, for they wrote on the houses of civilians sentences like "this house is to blown up because their owners are dealing with the Kurdistan Workers Party PKK. The owners of most of the houses that have been marked did not have any links with the Laborers Party, such as the house of Mr. Mahmoud Ahmed Sheikh Rashid, while the houses whose residents were Kurds with Arab neighbors, were being demolished by a special vehicle. Some of the houses:
Mohamed Kashtan - Izz El-Din Muslim - Mustafa Ibrahim, and many others...

End of Testimony

4)) Fourth testimony:

The media activist, Rodwan Bizar, 27 years, says:

Tal Abyad District is very important because it links the city Kopanjh / Ain Arab and the city of Ras al-Ain / Sri Cane; it is characterizes by the mosaic variation and mixture of different religions and nationalities. For security reasons, it was divided- after it was liberated from the regime's forces- into two sections:

The eastern section, the free army battalions and other battalions have the responsibility of maintaining and controlling it.

The western section, subjected directly to the authority of the Kurdish Peoples Protection Forces YPG.



After kidnapping the Emir of "Daash" by members of the Democratic Union Party PYD, which - according to their sources-arrested him when he was about to blow himself up in one of their security headquarters, the city witnessed an atmosphere full of rumors and threats from all parties, until it turned into real clashes between the parties, resulted in the killing and wounding of dozens.

Tension increased after the incident of detaining hundreds of Kurdish citizens, to be exchanged for the Emir and the four members that had been arrested. Furthermore, many women were insulted while their husbands and their youth were being detained, as one of the members of "Daash" abused and insulted a woman because - as he claimed- she was calling for a Kurdish state..

Al Layl Alley is one of the most places that experienced cases of looting and stealing, in addition to Al Jesr Alley, where money and household items and furniture were stolen, and where many several houses were blown up or demolished. One of the houses that were exploded is: Muhammad Ezzat Hussein. Till now (60) Kurdish citizens are still detained by Islamic Ahrar Al Sham Movement, and were taken to Raqqa Governorate and (30) other Kurdish citizens were taken by Al Nusra Front to Suluk District.

Islamic Ahrar Al Sham Movement has issued a statement to condemn the looting and stealing of the Kurdish houses, but on the ground their acts were contradicted what came in the statement, as the acts of looting continued, and another phenomenon of breaking in the shops of the Kurdish citizens spread, especially by the displaced who came to the city as a result of the bombing their cities had been exposed to by regime forces.

A link to the statement issued by Islamic Ahrar al-Sham Brigades and posted on several pages and websites, including the following website:

[.http://www.mjhar.com/ar-sy/NewsView/7/62134.aspx](http://www.mjhar.com/ar-sy/NewsView/7/62134.aspx)

End of Testimony



Summary and Results

1 - Two members of "Daash" were shot by Peoples Protection Forces YPG, the military wing of the Democratic Union Party PYD, and many were wounded although they were not fighting.

2 – detention recorded of more than 1,000 civilians for few hours was members of the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" and the "Al Nusra Front" to be exchanged later for the Emir "Abu Musab" and the members that were arrested with him. The majority were released, while about 60 detainees were kept retained and were taken to an unknown destination.

Some of the names that were detained, some of which were released afterward:

Saleh Haj Nakshi – Zakaria Jammo – Abu Ali Mirzo – Mahmoud Sheikho – Ismael Mirzo – Daleel Hamee – Shiro Hamee – Khaleel Hamee – Mustafa Khdr – Emad Hamee – Adel Ismael – Ibrahim Ibrahim – Yahya Jammo – Ali Jammo – Hatem Ismael – Khabat Ismael – Fadel Ismael – Hussen Sheikh Rasheed – Saleh Sheikh Rasheed – AbdulRahman Sheikh Rasheed – Ibrahim Sheikh Rasheed – Ilyas Omar – Haji Omar – As'ad Omar – Abdullah Jammo – Muhammad Jammo – Mahmoud Jammo – Kardo Muhammad – Raj Al Muhammad – Ala'a Ismael – Ismael Sheikho – Ibrahim Sheikho – Muhammad Al Omar – Waheed Al omar – Ali Al Omar

Cases of displacement were recorded for more than 400 families, mostly Kurdish ones, in addition to the displacement of the Arab and Turkmen families that used to live in Kurdish neighborhoods, especially in Al Layl Alley. Some of those families:

Al Wazzan family – Haneef Khdr – Khaleel Buzan – Ibrahim Ali and his sons – Khalfo family – Jammo family – Anwar Jazzo – Abu Kardo – Khaleel kudr – Mirzo family – Jaweesh family – Mustafa Muslim – Ibrahim Shami – Ibraheem family – Hasan Haji – Ali Sheikh Ali – Sheikh Ali Dali and his sons – Othman Shukri – Shukri Buzan – Haj Omar and his sons

4- Cases of looting and stealing of some houses and shops were recorded, in addition to seizing the gas station owned by the Kurdish Mahmoud Al-Ghanim.

The names of the people whose houses have been looted:



Mahmoud Sheikho (a house and a shop) – Juma'a Mustafa known as Jammo (a stock and some shops and houses of his and his sons') – Afar Muslim (a house)- Muhammad Khader (everything in house was destroyed) – Ismael Mirzo (a house) – Juma'a Jaweesh (a grain stock) – Zakarya Jammo (a house) – Hajji Ali Sheick Ali (a house)

5- Exploding some houses and demolishing others under the pretext of being associated with members of Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK, some of those houses:

Muhammad Izzat – Abu Ali Mirzo – Mahmoud Ahmad Sheikh Rasheed – Ez Al Deen Muslim – Muhammad Kashtan – Mustafa Ibrahim – Ismael Edan – Mahmoud Buzan – Muhammad Ali Al Ali

6- Cases of cursing and harassment at checkpoints were recorded, including a Kurdish woman's exposure to insults under the pretext that she calls for a Kurdish state

Recommendations

1 - The formation of an independent commission of inquiry by the human rights office of the opposing National Coalition in order to get acquainted by the recent events, compensate for the victims and uncover the truth of what happened so as such incidents not be repeated in other places.

2 –call on all the active social and civil figures to stand united against all practices that can disturb the peaceful coexistence between the citizens of the city.

3 - Fully neutralize civilians from all forms of conflict between the conflicting parties, maintain the private property of citizens and curb theft , looting and destruction that come in the midst of reprisals or by the mob.

Gratitude and Indication

VDC pays tribute to all those who contribute to complete this report, especially those eyewitnesses who insisted on testifying in order to be a part of the solution not a part of the problem. Finally, we note that VDC welcomes any further testimonies or contributions to expose the perpetrators of violations of any party, so as not to repeat such incidents under any pretexts or arguments.



For Any comments or question, we can be contacted through this email address:

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