

Violation Documentation Center

December 2013



Introduction:

VDC presents a detailed testimony on the detention of **Bayan Reehan**, a university student who was arrested by Branch 215 (Raid Brigade) that affiliates the Military Security. In this testimony, she details abusive treatment and torture she was subjected to in the branch.

Bayan was released, one month after her detention, in an exchange deal for 48 Iranian hostages that took place on 09/01/2013.

VDC has released many testimonies of several previous detainees in Branch 215.

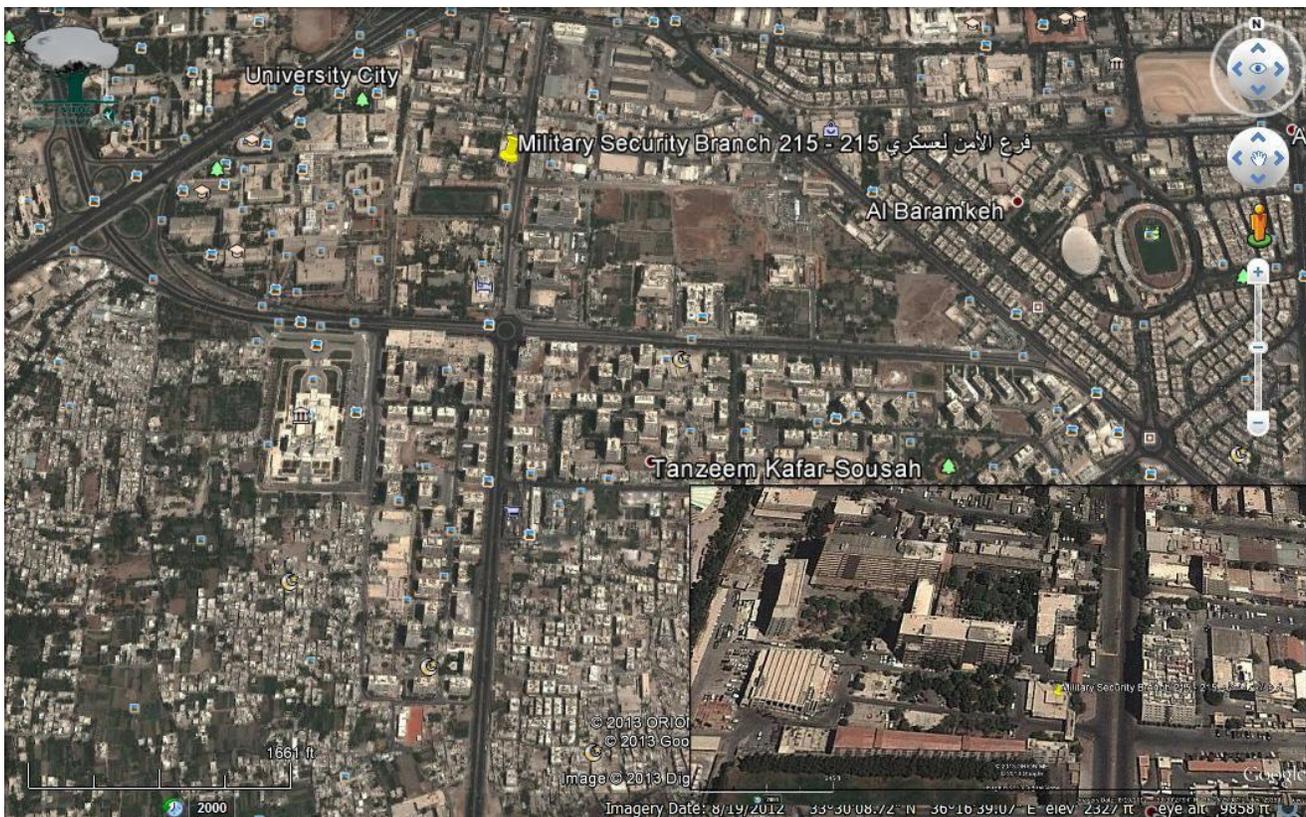
The interview is available on the center's Youtube Channel:

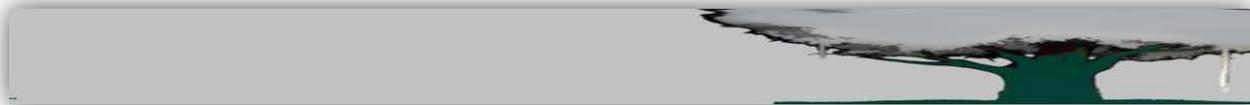
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_LwpHnaVcg&feature=youtu.be

Parts of the interview Subtitled in English:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3ipZ4JbV9M&feature=youtu.be>

**the location of Branch 215*





The Testimony:

My name is **Bayan Reehan**. I was born in 1986, unmarried, and I am studying Geography at the university. I got detained by the Military Security Branch 215 (Raid Brigade) on 25 Sep 2012 and was released on 25 Oct 2012.

Since the beginning of the revolutionary movement in Syria, I have participated in demonstrations especially in Eastern Gouta, and I have established the Coordination of (Revolutionist Women Towards Victory) on January 2012 that includes female revolutionary cadres, most of whom are university graduates. Our work was not limited to demonstrations; we have also contacted foreign media channels, prepared media reports and smuggled drugs to the Syrian interior. Furthermore, we have given educational sessions in first aid for young men and women because the security forces have been shooting at protesters.

The First Detention:

I got arrested for the first time by Syrian security forces in January 2012 for four and a half hours on Damascus- Homs International Highway, as they arrested me when I was with a delegation of foreign journalists (a journalist from Canada, and another from New Zealand) that was heading from Eastern Gouta to Damascus to cover the death of the French journalist **Gilles Jakiye**.

They interrogated me during those four and a half hours and then released me.

Subsequent to this arrest, the security forces pursued and tracked me in work and collage through (The Students Union in Damascus) that is known as a branch of 'Shabiha' who track the revolutionist students, which led to the delay of my graduation.

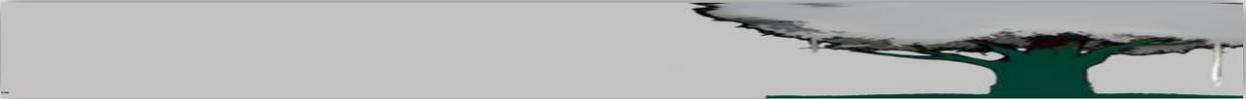
I tried to hide and change my appearance, and I moved from my home to another.

I hid till I got arrested in an ambush in Baghdad. St in Damascus.

The Ambush:

The ambush was set after the security forces hacked a friend's Skype account.

I was arranging a business meeting with him. However, I turned out to be chatting with a security officer who hacked my friend's account a night before the ambush and then hacked my account as well. We agreed to meet in Baghdad Street thus they facilitated the passage at checkpoints leading into Baghdad Street and stopped checking the names on the computer.



So when I passed Baghdad Street -as planned- I got arrested and they directed their weapons at me and the two friends who were with me, one of whom is called (*Nour Huda Hijazi*).

There were a bus, a car and more than 20 armed members, as if they were going to catch some drug dealers or an arm-trafficking gang and not civilian activists.

I was detained at 11:00 am, and was insulted and humiliated badly by the officer in-charge.

The young man with us, whose name I would keep anonymous out of respect to his desire, was exposed to violent beating.

They blindfolded us and drove us to the Raid Brigade 215 in Kafersouseh. We arrived at the branch within 10 minutes, then, at the sixth floor we entered an office in which there were three interrogators, several army officers and three technicians (to get into our Facebook and Skype accounts)

I was the Information Supervisor in Baraa Brigade in Eastern Gouta that has captured 48 officers of the (Iranian Revolutionary Guards) for whom Iran was putting pressure on the Syrian government, thus I was arrested in an attempt to make me confess the place of the abducted Iranians as I was involved in that case for I was responsible for feeding them.

Unfortunately, I was arrested, insulted and beaten for the sake of these foreigners who came to kill Syrians despite the fact that I was keen to treat them humanly and respectfully as war prisoners.

At first, I was not tortured at all; they have just asked me to locate the farm where the Iranians prisoners were.

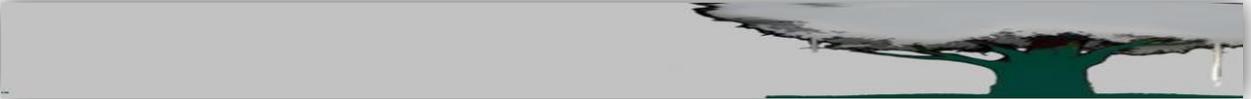
My friends knew about my appointment at that day so I tried to stall as much as possible in the investigation in order to give them the chance to change their places to safer ones and secure their families.

Considering that I am a Geography student, the interrogator asked me to locate the place of the Iranian hostages using Google Earth.

They separated me from my friends and I was seated in front of a PC with an open Google Earth page.

They asked me to locate the place. They were using a high speed internet.

At that moment, I began shaking as there were two army officers waiting for me to locate the site so they broke into the Eastern Gouta as they had prepared a military force with plans to storm the area there.



The interrogator wanted to know the types of weapons the Free Army had, and they also asked me about several Skype and Facebook accounts and passwords, thus I gave them to the technician, and then I located the site on a map and lead them to a road where-I was certain- the Free Army would repel them.

They also gave me a paper to draw them a way to storm the area after I had located the farm, noting that there had been two previous attempts to storm Gouta and reach the Iranians, however, they failed.

I intended to give them false information, which allowed me to know that they had no idea about the location of the farm where the Iranians were held.

I drew them a road through Google Earth on which I knew free army would be stationed; I sent them to an ambush.

It was about 12 o'clock.

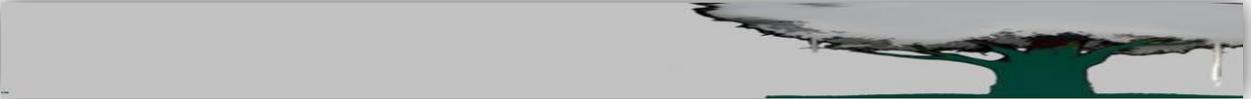
Another issue is that only three members of Baraa Brigade were responsible for the Iranians, while there were many Free Army members so I thought that our lives are not worth the lives of dozens of the Free Army members who would be killed if I had guided the army and security forces to the farm. This put a tremendous psychological pressure on me to prioritize things.

I draw a map on the paper they gave me, and they were happy with the result that one of the interrogators said to me that the "President" Bashar al-Assad will be extremely happy because I gave them this information and that they knew that I have been "deceived" so I replied that I did not support the current state of the revolution and that I craved reform; I just said what they wanted to hear.

During interrogation, my eyes were blindfolded, and they only let me see when I used the computer for they were cautious neither to let me see them nor to look around the room. However, I used to peek to know the surroundings, and to see the reflection of the interrogator on the Computer's screen.

While locating the farm, an interrogator questioned the information I had provided so I asked him to verify it by the help of any agent from Doma. Indeed, he asked one of the agents from the area in-question, and he told him that it was the same farm they entered when they wanted to storm Douma before. Thus, the interrogator asked me –after making sure of the location- about the weapons in the farm. They had already viewed a Facebook conversation of mine during which I was talking about an arms deal, thus I lied and exaggerated the number of Free Army members and the quantity of weapons and they have.

They have also brought my friend to the room to ask him about the best way to storm the farm.



He wanted to show them a different way where there were no members of the Free Army but I insisted that way I selected was the proper way to break into the farm . I lead them to the road where the Free Army had stationed.

They beat him in front of me, then put him outside. After that, they took me out of the room, and blindfolded me. All the security and army officers and technicians there gathered in the room leaving me outside. Although blindfolded, I could see my friend standing next to me.

I just wanted my friends to be set free so I whispered to him not to confess anything to them and to tell them that he knew me when I was working at the Civil Defense Hospital of Doma.

While taking to him, an officer slapped me on the face that my head hit the wall behind. I started cursing so he started hitting me with both hands. Then, all agents –passing the corridor- hit my face till it was swollen and I felt that I can no longer tolerate the beatings.

The interrogator took me then to a room and asked me to write down my confessions. I burst in tears. During my detention, I did not address any officer by the word 'Sir'. I just avoided using this word.

I started writing my confessions. I wrote that the reason why I supported the revolution is the shooting of peaceful demonstrators in Doma.

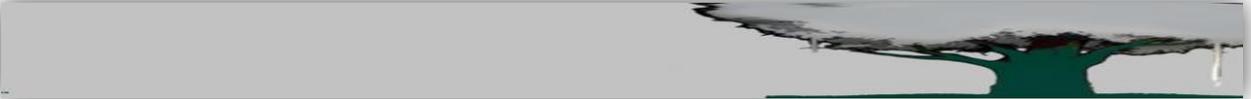
The interrogator took the five papers on which I wrote the confessions and left me at the door of a dormitory beside my friend *Nour* who was blindfolded, too. I guess it was 1:30 pm. They seated us on a wooden box and warned us not to talk to each other. However, I said to her quietly "If I die, please forgive me"

She laughed and I laughed, too.

The guard came and asked us not to speak. Anyway, we prepared identical answers for the interrogation session; I asked her to throw full responsibility on my shoulders as I am the supervisor of the Information Office in al-Braa Brigade and the administrator of 'Revolutionist Women Towards Victory'. I also told her to say that she had joined the revolution seven months after it started, although she had joined the Revolution right from its beginning, and that I got her involved in revolutionary activities.

Here, we laughed again that the interrogator heard us and beat us, then they give us food after they cancelled the idea of storming Doma knowing that they were not ready, especially that I exaggerated the numbers of armed men and their weapons there, in addition to the road they should take to reach the farm.

We were on the sixth floor. They took us to the cell after they undid our blindfold. We entered the cell laughing, which surprised the prisoners there, and they started asking us about the



current situation after they had confirmed us that we were detained in Branch 215. We drank some water and had some rest.

Then, they called only my name without my friend (*Nour Hijazi*)

The Torture:

They called me again for another interrogation. The interrogator reviewed my confessions and my chats on Skype that they had got. He asked me why I had not written the story of my previous detention and that I had been detained in Khateeb Branch. I answered him 'don't you knew everything!'.
Here, the interrogator cursed me and said "How dare you?", then brought an iron baton and hit me on my left shoulder. I tried to cover my face in order to protect it. He beat me till I could no longer feel my hands and legs.

I was alone with him in the interrogation room where he plugged in an electric torturing device and electrified me with every question.

I began to lose focusing. He threatened me that he would kill my friend whom I really liked. The psychological torturing was way harder than the physical one. Afterwards, an interrogator came in and asked me to confess, otherwise they would torture me so I told him that I would. He didn't, however, allow me to speak. He brought me a cup of tea, tore my confession papers and asked me to rewrite again. It was about six in the evening then.

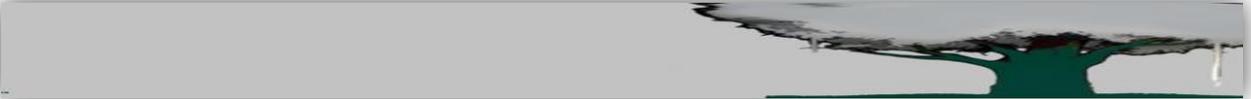
Every time they read my confessions, they tore them and asked me to rewrite them again till I could no longer feel my hand.

Here, I told him that I had participated in all demonstrations that went out in Douma, and did not miss any martyrs' funeral, and that I had taken pictures about Douma, uploaded videos, filmed two reports that were broadcast on AlArabyia Channel, and accompanied foreign journalists in Douma as an interpreter.

I told him that I had confessed everything I knew about the Iranians so he asked me why I rebelled against the government, and continued: the Government has give you a house, and let you study in the university. I replied that I had not studied in a university that belongs to the government and that the university itself was the reason why I went out to call for toppling the regime, in addition to the corruption spread in Damascus University and the unqualified inexperienced professors who are "Shabiha"!

The university is full of corruption and favoritism for the children of officers and officials.

He asked me to tell him about the first demonstration I went in, yet I was exhausted as it was about 8 in the evening.



There were two interrogators, one of whom was violent, while the other was gentle and spoke in a reassuring way.

After the interrogation, I went back to the cell. The interrogator told me that I was going to be interrogated again the following day. When I got back to the cell, I knew that they had also called my friend for interrogation and that they had beaten her less than they beat me for she had only been slapped on the face.

I sat in a corner and cried. I had not had eaten lunch yet.

On the next day around 9:30, they called me for interrogation. For the following six days, I had a 10-12 hour-interrogation session every day that the officer got tired but I didn't.

During those sessions, I was only exposed to psychological torture but not physical.

Bayan continues:

the interrogation lasted for 6 consecutive days from 8:00 am till 7:00 pm.

I was trying to be stronger than the interrogator that I did not have any lunch meal in the interrogation room; My cellmate hid me some food to eat after the interrogation session.

On the seventh day, they interrogated me for only half a day.

The interrogation stopped after I confessed. After that, they interrogated my friend Nour for a day and a half.

On the eighth day, they asked me two questions only to make sure of a specific piece of information, and I was not called for interrogation after that.

I saw my file which was really huge. The interrogator asked my not to mention any thing about the Iranians to my cellmates and to forget about the whole subject.

The Cell:

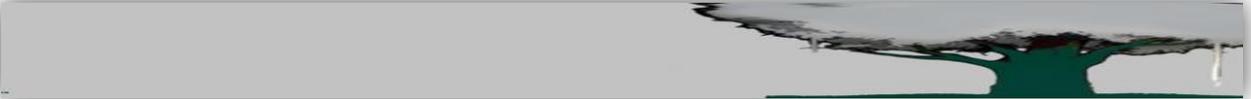
The cell was 3*2 m and It was next to males' cells, a thing that bothered the jailors who did not want women in that branch. Yet, due to our serious charges we were put in Branch 215.

We were 9 women prisoners in the cell.

1-*Do'aa* (a university student)

2-*San'aa* (a university graduate)

3-*Waf'aa* (a housewife)



Some of them had no revolutionary activities at all.

4-**Om Muhammad** from Aleppo who is an old woman (65 years old) and who suffered a hypertension. Once, she had a very high blood pressure. I tried to give her first aid, yet when the nurse came, he refused to give her any medication because he did not know the proper dosage.

5-(**ThulFaqqar**) from Aleppo, and she is a relative of Om Muhammad.

6-**Shaim'aa** from DeirEzzor. A seventeen-year-old teenager.

7-A mental patient who used to call herself "**Mirvat Assad**". She was a security officer before a colleague of hers set her up. Thus, she was tortured and lost a part of her memory. She used to claim that Bashar Assad is her husband!!

It was fun to have her with us.

8 & 9 **Waf'aa** and **Zeinab** (16 years old)

None of them has been subjected to torture.

Medication:

The only medicine they provided us with was painkillers 'Dimadol'. I suffered dysentery but they refused to give me any medicine.

One time **Om Muhammad** suffered high blood pressure, we asked them to bring her some garlic. However, they did not mind if she died. When the nurse checked her blood pressure, he said it was 12/8, but I told him that he was wrong and that it was 16/10. Later on, they checked her blood pressure outside the cell so that I did not observe the process.

Another detainee suffered hemolysis, yet they did not give her medication.

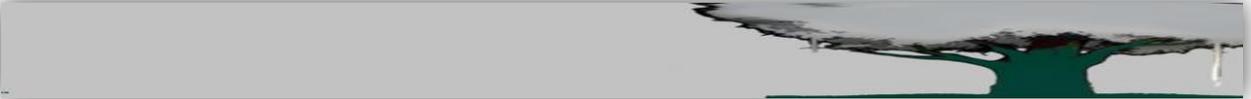
San'aa had a bone disease, thus she was the only detainee that was allowed to take medicine.

Om Muhammad was charged of arms smuggling although she had nothing to do with it; however she got arrested following a false report by a relative of hers. During the shelling on Aleppo, she and **ThulFaqqar** fled to Latakia where they were arrested.

Nour, Sanaa and I had revolution-related charges.

Shaim'aa, on the other hand, had a charge of 'bringing around' regime officers to Free Army to kill them and she was 'proved' guilty, but she was not exposed to physical torture.

Do'aa from Douma had the same charge of **Shaim'aa**. However, although she was proved guilty, we all -female detainees from Douma- had a special treatment.



Food:

We were nine detainees in the cell and this number has changed many times. Sleeping condition was good especially that branch 215 was not ready to receive women. Food was so bad and rotten which caused a massive loss in our weight.

For breakfast, they provided a spoonful of sweet, one olive, one egg, some jam and some tea in 'Qasaa' (a big container) that was divided into two parts and it was rusty.

On Thursdays, they provided sweets for the female detainees.

On Thursdays, they provided sweets for the female detainees. For lunch, they provided boiled rice, eggplant, potato in addition to undrinkable soup and a cucumber, a tomato or an apple. Guards always stole our share of apples.

On Thursdays, we had 1 kg of chicken with a cucumber, a tomato or an apple for all of us.

The meals were always like this.

At 11:00 pm they turned off the lights so that we sleep.

Torturing male detainees:

Torturing male detainees- especially newcomers.- was carried out mostly at night after 11:00 pm after closing all the cells.

We were not able to sleep because of the other prisoners' screams. I remember a young detainee from the Faculty of Engineering I believe. They kept torturing him near our cell's door till he lost conscious. Then, they took him to the bathroom and poured water on him. Next, they brought him back and tortured him with electricity that he became unconscious again. They kept repeating that till late that night (about 3:00 am) noting that they began torturing him at 10:30. He was being beaten brutally.

I couldn't know his name, but he is from Western Gouta; from Babila or Yalda.

Bayan continues:

After the 7th day, they stopped any interrogation with us, except for one question for me about a woman from Douma as they were tracking her family.



From Collective to Solitary Cell:

On the twenty first night of our detention, at 11:00 pm, the Chief of the branch, known as Sharshabil, who was the worst person in the branch, entered and asked me and *Nour* to grab our stuff and go with him, so we bid our cellmates farewell.

It was so strange that they didn't take our fingerprints on our statements with the charges as they usually do, so we thought they would field-execute us. The guards were confused and the chief was smiling slyly showing his golden tooth. He threatened us with beating and torturing in case we came out with any sound. While we were defending ourselves that we haven't made any sound, we were surprised that he asked us to go into the corridor of male cells!

During our way out, we noticed tight security and that the ventilation openings for the male detainees cells were closed. they put us in a 1 *1.5 m cell full of insects with a 15*10 cm ventilation opening , two blankets on the floor a bottle of water and no light at all.

Previously, we asked the other detainees to fast in an attempt to raise up our spirits; I was afraid that they might've discovered it and thought we are Salafists or Muslim Brothers.

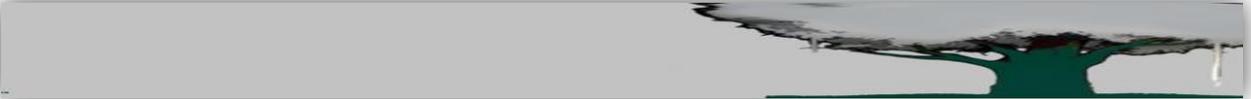
I cried for I didn't know the reason behind moving us to a solitary cell. The next day, the guards didn't tell us anything. We started revising our interrogation till lunch time at 2:30 pm when the bad guard with his two assistance *Abu Omar* and *Ahmad* brought us our lunch.

Then *Abu Ahmad* came and asked us to prepare ourselves. They blindfolded us and for the first time they handcuffed us and took us to the interrogation room where we waited for 30 minutes. After that they took us to some other building. We went up to the first floor and we entered a room that looked just like an interrogation room with a table and a fan in it where they left us there for 45 minutes...

Then they took us outside the building and put us in a dark blue car as I could peek despite the blindfold. A security member sat between us and it was so hot inside the car.

We thought we would be transferred to the court then to the Central Prison of Adra, but they didn't give us our deposits and there was no trials at that time; "where are they taking us then?"

They put us in another car with 6 detainees (three men and three women). As the car moved the door of the branch was opened and we got out.



Hostages Exchange Deal:

They drove us for about ten minutes before we entered a dim tunnel where we could hear a woman screaming out of torture.

Because we didn't go so far, I thought we were in al-Omaween or in Mazzeh and that they would execute us there.

Then a security member dragged my hand and took me and *Nour* up to a marvel stair where I smelled a strong male perfume.

We took the elevator up to some floor, and we entered a big hall where they undid the handcuffs and blindfolds. Then we entered a smaller hall; it was an office with Bashar Assad picture on the wall.

In the office, they started treating us well.

Two of the 'Shabiha' with an office entered; they were looking at us as if we were their enemies. Three foreign men entered as well, two of them (called *Boland* and *Izzat*) were Turkish members in the Turkish (Ihaha) Human rights Organization. They checked on our health, and asked the others about their names. Then, I knew that they were from Douma and that our names are enlisted in an exchange deal, so I smiled

Boland took photos with us like a souvenir- as he claimed; however, I knew those photos were saved for the exchange deal. He told me that we would be with our families soon, then the guards handcuffed us again.

We went back to Branch 215 in Kafersousseh, and to the same solitary cell after they removed the blindfolds and handcuffs.

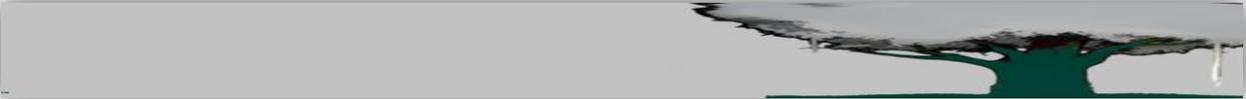
After that, the guards told us to prepare ourselves for a videotaped interview with al-Dunia TV or the Syrian TV to talk about the city of Douma. I approved because I was under pressure and because I wanted to be released along with my cellmates.

At 09:00 pm, they took us to the interrogation room. We noticed that the corridors were emptied and the guards were cleaning them.

We were then taken to a room to write a pledge not to stage nor incite any demonstrations.

Our hands were not cuffed.

I was asked to sign my confessions and a written pledge not to protest, incite or perform any anti-government activity as well. And to transfer a written text on a computer screen in front of me, then they videotaped my confessions.



The Release:

We took the bus out of the branch expecting that they would leave us at KaferSoseh Square as usual. The bus, however, took a road between mountains and we entered a luxurious villa with a lot of armed security around it.

They undid the handcuffs and blindfolds and took me, along with the Nour and the other detainees enlisted in the photo session, inside the villa where they handed us our deposits. I grabbed my cell phone to talk to my mother.

During this time *Boland* and *Izzat* from the Turkish Organization entered and checked on us. After that the Iranian Ambassador to Syria entered and started flattering with us and told us that we all have one enemy which is Israel but we kept silence.

We got out after that and took the bus again with the driver and the two Turkish men. We weren't blindfolded or handcuffed. We left the Iranian Ambassador's villa and headed to the International Airport Road escorted by security cars and motorcycles till we got to al-Milaiha Checkpoint. The driver, who was an officer, removed the 'branch sign' of the bus and told *Boland* and *Izzat* that he cannot go any further as it's a 'terrorist zone' and asked them to drive the bus.

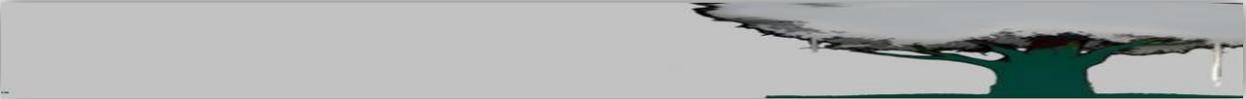
As we entered al-Mliha, we were stopped by the Free Army. I told *Nour* that if we escaped the fire of the Syrian Army, we will not escape that of the Free Army as we were in a security bus and the windows were dimmed and closed.

Free Army members started questioning us thinking that we were 'infiltrators' sent by Syrian Security. I told them that we are members of the Information Office of al-Baraa Brigade and that we were released as a part of an exchange deal. They called *Zahran Alloush*, Head of al-Islam Brigade whose relatives were with us. They gave us two choices; either to go through Doma Road where there were clashes and shelling or to take Jisrin Road where there was an army checkpoint. We took Jisrin Road and the army stopped us and they started questioning us. We informed them that we didn't have any identification cards.

We spent an hour at that checkpoint where I thought I would be killed by either the two armies especially that I witnessed all the clashes and the shelling on Douma.

They asked us to spend the night there, but we informed them that the officer at the previous checkpoint asked to facilitate our entrance. However, he said they had nothing to do with them. One hour later, they allowed us to pass. After ten minutes we were stopped-for the fourth time-by the Free Army.

Izzat told me that we would continue to Jisrin, but I couldn't take it anymore and I was afraid that we were going to face some other checkpoints so I told *Izzat* that I would get off and continue my way home on foot. *Izzat* warned us that we were still 'wanted' because of our anti-



government activities and that we were there just to see our families and that they would take us to Turkey after that.

Izzat asked us to get on the bus and told us that the exchange deal stated that after seeing my family I should go to Damascus International Airport to fly to Turkey. That's when I started crying as I knew I wouldn't be with my family and that my city was destroyed and that some of my family members were detained.

I got back to the bus, and when we reached Jisrin, *Boland* and *Izzat* left us with al-Baraa Brigade.

We changed our clothes to make sure they did not contain any tracking devices, then we were taken to a house to spend the night. However, I could not sleep at all.

On the following day, I was moved from one house to another until I met my family; it was the best moment in my life when I saw my mother and brothers, however I had to say goodbye to go to Turkey.

Upon that time, Douma witnessed a lot of displacement cases and I couldn't leave with my family. All that prevented me from going to Turkey as planned so I stayed in Douma with a more frequent revolutionary activity.

Hearing about oppression is so different from living it for 30 days in the regime detention centers.

This made me more persistent to topple the regime, not this one only but any regime with oppressive and unfair Ideology that calls for killing, suppressing freedoms or imprisonment. I don't want any 'detention centers'.

*The interview was conducted in Eastern Gouta on 18-19 Jul 2013

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For any questions, please contact us:

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