

# Human Rights Watch

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/09/syria-no-word-4-abducted-activists>

## Campaign and Advocacy

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A Year on, No Information on Douma 4

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(New York) The prominent Syrian human rights defenders Razan Zaitouneh, Samira al-Khalil, Wael Hamada, and Nazem Hammadi the Douma Four remain missing a year after their abduction, 71 organizations said today. The four were abducted in Douma, a city near Damascus under the control of armed opposition groups. They should be released immediately, the groups said.

On December 9, 2013, at about 10:40 p.m., a group of armed men stormed into the office of the Violations Documentation Center in [Syria](#) (VDC), a Syrian human rights monitoring group, in Douma and abducted Razan Zaitouneh, the head of the center, and her colleagues Wael Hamada, who is also her husband, Samira al-Khalil, and Nazem Hamadi. The four human rights defenders have not been heard of since.

The armed groups exercising de facto control over Douma 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 Zaitouneh and her colleagues 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, 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 in Syria, and co-founded the Local Coordination Committees (LCC), 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 nongovernmental organizations in besieged eastern Ghouta.

As a result, she had been threatened both by the Syrian authorities and armed opposition groups. 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 activists outside Syria in September 2013 that she was being threatened by local armed groups in Douma. In April 2014, Zaitouneh's family issued a [statement](#) holding Zahran Alloush 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. She was detained by the Syrian government 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 Douma 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, Hamada was detained, and subsequently released by the government. He is an active member and co-founder of the LCC and the VDC. Before his abduction 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 LCC 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 Zaitouneh, Hammada, al-Khalil, and Hammadi.

## Signatories

Alhaqanya Organization for Law firm and Law, Egypt  
Alkarama Foundation  
Amnesty International  
Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)  
Assyrian Network for Human Rights  
Badael for sustainable peace in Syria  
Caabu The Council for Arab-British Understanding  
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)  
Center for Media and Cultural Freedom  
Center of Women Studies in Palestine  
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation  
Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies  
Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR)  
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights  
Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)  
European Women Initiative  
Every Casualty, UK  
Femmes pour la Dmocratie  
Fraternity Center for Democracy and Civil Society  
Freedom House, USA  
Front Line Defender  
Gulf Center for Human Rights Studies (GCHRS)  
HIVOS Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries  
HRDAG Human Rights Data Analysis Group  
Human Rights Watch (HRW)  
Humanrights.ch / MERS- Swiss  
Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)  
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)  
International Media Support (IMS)  
Kesh Malak Organization, Aleppo, Syria  
Kurdish Organization for Human Rights in Syria (DAD)  
Lawyers for Lawyers, Netherland  
Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH)  
Local Development and Small Projects Support office (LDSPS)  
Maan Organization for Supporting Women Issues  
No Peace without Justice (NPWJ)  
Nuestra Aparente Rendicin Association  
Pax Christi International  
PAX for Peace, Netherland  
RAW in WAR (Reach All Women in War)  
Swedish Network for Democracy and Human Rights  
Syria Campaign  
Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC)  
Syrian Association for Citizenship  
Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)  
Syrian Center for Studies and Legal Researches  
Syrian Human Rights Network (SHRN)  
Syrian Liberals Lawyers Association  
Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, UK  
Syrians for Citizenship State  
Syrian Women's Network  
The Day after Association (TDA)  
The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)  
The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Sweden  
The World Organization against Torture (OMCT)  
Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria (CCSDS)  
Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC)

Additional organizations joined the statement after release:

Adopt Revolution Organization.  
Heinrich-Bll-Stiftung, Germany  
AlWaref Institute for Humanitarian Studies  
TheNonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty (PRNTT)  
Syrian Women League  
Diyarbakr Bar Association (Diyarbakr Barosu)  
anlurfa Bar Association (anlurfa Barosu)  
Batman Bar Association (Batman Barosu)  
zgrrlk Hukukular Dernei - Association of Lawyers for Freedom  
Reporters Without Borders  
Syrian Archive Initiative

Tactical Technology Collective  
Small Media Organization  
Syrian Activists Monitoring

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