

Rajm Slaibi .. A Checkpoint of Death in Al Hasakeh
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IDPs sleep on bare land in Rajm Al Slaibi (Justice for Life)

The United Nations declared¹ in April 2nd 2017 that the current war in Syria caused displacement of 13.5 million people including those who were displaced inside Syria many times. This rates Syria on the top of the list of internally displaced people. Such case of displacement with this enormous number has a parallel prison which is imposed on the civilians by some dominating forces on the ground, especially in eastern Syria. Deir Ezzor, Al Hasakeh and Al Raqqa have close nature, dialects, traditions and tribal society. All of them was marginalized by the governing authority, which was considering them as “developing regions” before 2011 as they were characterized by the poverty of their locals and the simplicity of their style of life until the war-years among the belligerent forces imposed a geographic segmentation among their locals along with inhumane treatment among the tribe sons.

¹ Speech of Kelly T. Clements UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees in Kuwait on April 2nd 2017.

“Islamic State” group controls most of the area of Deir Ezzor and Al Raqqa governorates. The group prevents the civilians in its held areas from leaving towards areas that are held by other forces such as regime forces, opposition factions, and self-rule held ones. This forced thousands of civilians to risk their souls and depend on local smugglers to flee towards Al Hanakeh mainly despite the excessive amounts they have to pay.

Most of people who have to leave the “Islamic State” held areas by smuggling routes are patients, women, children, and elderly along with some young men who look for job or better future away from the group decisions that control the details of the civilians lives, additionally, the difficult economic conditions that got worse after the control of the group.

The Death Voyage



“Justice for Life” organization reached out to some Deir Ezzor IDPs in Al Hasakeh and got their testimonies that document their arduous voyage. Mariam, Um Bassam, a 65-year-old women who started her fleeing voyage, which she called her “ The Death Voyage” , with a smuggler by a car from eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor to Abo Hamda, 50km south

to Al Hol in southeaster countryside of Al Hasakeh. Following their arrival to Abo Hamda, they met Iraqi refugees. Then, they were moved by a truck to Um Al Bashaer. They were told by the smuggler that they have to keep walking to reach Rajm Slaibi checkpoint, which is controlled by People's Protection Units.

“ I could not stand walking anymore as the nature of the ground was arid, and during the voyage it was raining and the ground became muddy and hard to walk on.” “ The smuggler returned me with a 47-year-old sick women to the house of one of his relatives in the area”. After five days, the smuggler asked me to pay 50k SP, \$1 equals 530SP, in order to take me by a car to Rajm Slaibi checkpoint”. I refused as the agreement was that he should reach me to the checkpoint for 125k SP only” , Um Bassam says.

Um Bassam left the temporary house after two days and she was moved by a motorcycle to an unknowns destination for heading to the checkpoint after paying 20k SP to a taxi driver.

“before reaching the checkpoint, I saw more than ten dead bodies in the desert along with a lot of travel bags, clothes, and personal belongings for people who tried to flee the hell of “Islamic State” group, however, the landmines that were planted in the buffer zone between the Group and the Units were a lockout.” Um Bassam adds.

I have seen a woman with her husband, son, and five-year-old daughter who reached the checkpoint on their feet without a smuggler from “Islamic State” held areas in Deir Ezzor eastern countryside. Before they arrive the checkpoint, a landmine exploded and killed the son, and the girl was crucially injured and died when they reached the checkpoint. The father asked the checkpoint fighters to get his son’s body and he was ready to pay one million Syrian pound. However, his request was rejected as the area is heavily planted with landmines” she said.

Um Bassam describes the place of Rajm Al Slaibi as disgusting one, the handful tents nearby the checkpoint as dirty. The old woman continued her voyage to Al Hol camp, which was not to be compared with Rajm Al Slaibi as she said as the tents are big and the camp administration provides the IDPs with a pad, sheets, water, charger, along with food items and hygiene kit on periodic basis.

“ A Camp in the Hell “



IDPs who try to build a small tent by using some sheets in Rajm Al Slaibi , Justice for Life

Abo Ismael, a 58-year-old IDP who fled from Deir Ezzor city to Al Boukmal in the eastern countryside. He started the fleeing voyage from Al Mayadin towards Al Hasakeh.

Abo Ismael says; at 07:00 am the minibus moved with the smuggler. We were 10 people, my family was 7, my sister's family was 5, and my brother's family was 4 people. Each one had to pay 150k SP in Al Mayadin city, we passed through Al Bsaira, Al Mashekh, Thalja, and Rajm Fares in Al Hasakeh countryside, which was the last reached point with the smuggler, who returned with the minibus driver.

“ We were hosted by another smuggler from the locals and he works as sheep farmer. He ordered us to leave the overload and bring only personal bag. The smuggler asked to be paid with 10k SP for each person. After long discussion, we paid 7k SP for each one. We started again walking at 07:00 pm. After walking for about 7 hours, the smuggler informed us that this is the last point he could reach and we have to continue without him for 1km to reach the checkpoint. He confirmed that we have to carry white cloth and wave. We reached Rajm Al Slaibi checkpoint. The members took out IDs. It was only a desert and there were no tents.

“Sky is over us, nothing on the ground but soil. We were about to die from thirst, hunger, and lack of healthcare. Some of the IDPs in the camp reside in graves they dug for sleeping inside, and others sleep outdoor”

Abo Ismael stayed in Rajm Al Slaibi for 23 days, during this period he describes the treatment of PPU with the arrivals as “very bad”. The urgent health cases were not treated as required. Abo Ismael mentioned that two men arrived the checkpoint; the first one was injured in his head and shoulder, the second one was injured in his leg due to the explosion of a landmine during their voyage. However, the checkpoint members only bandaged them without taking them to a medical point, as it happens with two women who were stung by a scorpion, and their treatment was limited to first aid.

The nightmare voyage and residing Rajm Al Slaibi, the Hell Camp as described by Abo Ismael, was ended by a sponsor who took them to Al Hol camp after paying 25k SP for each person.

Al Hol .. a Mercilessly Camp



Al Hol Camp (Justice for Life)

In early 1991 during the “Gulf war” or “Kuwait Liberation War”, the UNHCR established Al Hol camp nearby the Syrian-Iraqi border (50km east of Al Hasakeh city). In 2003, the camp was reopened during the war of US on Iraq. In April 2016, the camp was activated for hosting the Syrian IDPs along with Iraqi IDPs who flee “Islamic State” and the current war.

Despite the better conditions of Al Hol camp in comparison with Rajm Al Slaibi, the blackmailing, bribery, and carelessness of urgent medical cases were characteristics of PPU’s members, despite the fact that the camp is supervised by UNHCR.

Hasan KH is a man in his fourth decade who fled with his friend and relative from Margada, which is still held by “Islamic State” to Al Hasakeh for traveling to KSA. However, a patrol of PPU stopped them in Al Nasha neighborhood and took them to Al Hol camp.

Hasan says: PPU members take all the official documents and cellphones of the arrivals to the camp. They bring the civilians and register their information at the UNHCR for taking the humanitarian aid which is given based on the information of those IDPs.

He confirms that he was a witness of two death cases in Al Hol camp as the PPU did not allow the patients to the hospitals of Al Hasakeh or Damascus to receive medical treatment.

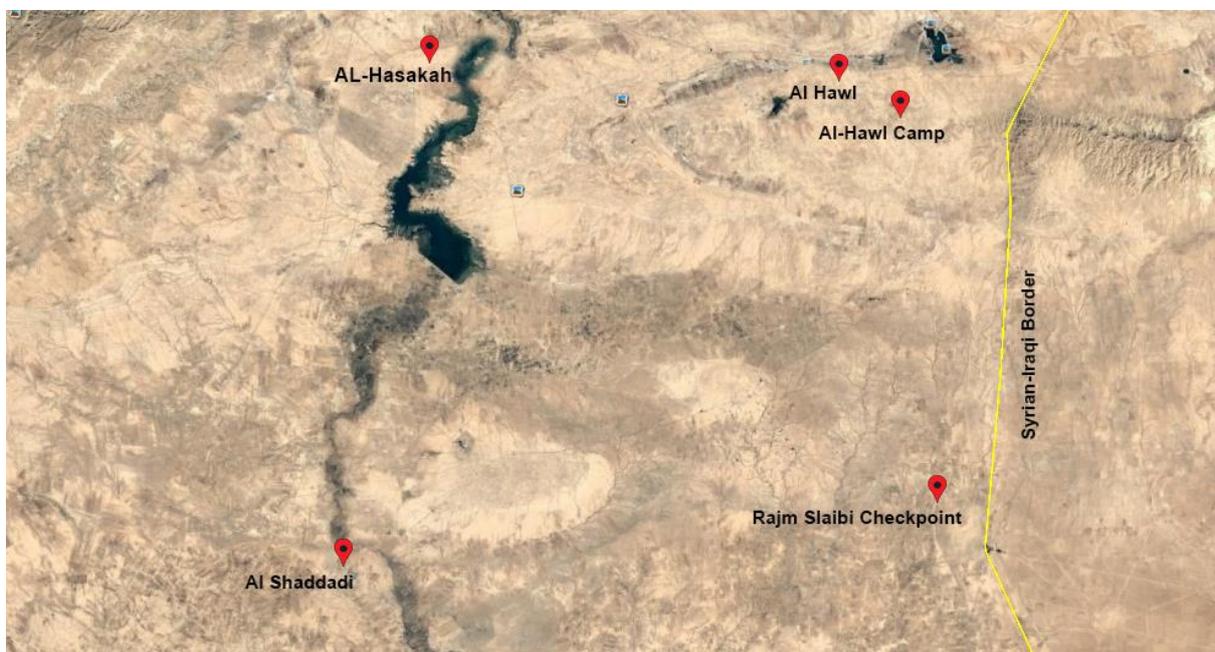
“there is no mercy in Al Hol. The PPU members take from the person who want to leave the camp 55k SP including the children, which is the double amount of ticket price. They also impose 425k SP for people who want to travel to KSA.”

More than 30 days Hasan remained in Al Hol camp until they reached a smuggler who works with the PPU. He took 100k SP for each person.

People Protect Units and UNHCR.... A Shared Responsibility

An informed source, who asked not to be named, said that UNHCR is held responsible for the bad conditions of the abovementioned areas. The “Self-rule” opened a medical point and it provides aid as per its resources, as said by the source. The first grade of responsibility should be held on the UNHCR in facilitating the movement of IDPs especially that the regime forces are not cooperative in providing a flight trip on weekly basis for transporting people who desire to travel to Damascus, he added.

Rajm Slaibi is located 4km to “Islamic State” held areas. It is described by a temporary voyage and the sole port for IDPs who come from Iraq to Syria, and the IDPs who flee from Deir Ezzor and Al Raqqa.



The source confirms that 50-60 families are arriving daily to Rajm Al Slaibi, and UNHCR supervises the crossing point in terms of IDPs. The distance between the two camps is about 4km, which is a military zone and held by PPU who cannot move any IDP without a military order from PPU investigation apparatus.

“No tents, electricity, water, food, nor communications means are available, only desert where IDPs make of sacks and clothes covers for the graves they reside in”.

Al Hol camp can host about 6k IDPs, however, it hosts more than 20k IDPs and refugees. 60% of them are women, children, and elderly, which causes obstacles to following up all patients' cases as there is only one medical point in the camp. Only one doctor, one pharmacist, and two nurses work in this point.

The source added based the staff of Al Hol camp clinic that two death cases took place in Al Hol camp along with one case in Rajm Al Slaibi . The source confirmed that he was attending a meeting of UNHCR with IDPs from Deir Ezzor and Al Raqqa during a visit to the camp.

The resident of the camp has to have a sponsor in order to leave the camp, or to have a flight ticket from Al Qamishli airport to Damascus as the source added that more than half of the IDPs of Al Hol do not desire to stay in Al Hasakeh in case they leave the camp, so their destination is either Damascus or abroad.

Activists' estimations² indicate that 390k civilians of Deir Ezzor fled the governorate including 190k people from Al Hasakeh governorate during the past six years. The “Islamic State” group is considered the main reason that civilians are risking their lives and depending on local smugglers in order to reach areas that are held by other forces.

² A survey issued by Syrian Network for Human Rights on internally displaced people in Syrian governorates in 2016.