
In Yalda 2019 brought deaths, expropriation, and arrests; 2020 begins with mass arrests of children

The village of Yalda in southern Damascus entered a reconciliation agreement with Assad's regime in **2014** . The people in this village hoped it would give them some reprieve from the suffering inflicted by the military, that they would be able to repair their homes and regain some sense of normalcy. What they got instead was forced recruitment of their youth, campaigns of arrests by the security forces, confiscation of property and neglect of basic services. And to make matters even worse, they entered the new year with Assad's security forces conducting a raid in which some **50** children were arrested.

If you walk down the famous "Al Koshk Square" in the center of Yalda, you will see ruins, excavated roads and piles of rubbish everywhere. All clear signs of collective punishment through neglect that the regime is inflicting upon the people who supposedly "reconciled" more than five years ago. This despite the fact that more than **200** people from this area who reconciled with Assad were killed in fighting in the north of Syria after being forcibly recruited into the regime's army, forced to fight their old friends and relatives .

The families of these "martyrs" from Yalda were entitled to be treated well, as is the uniform custom central to the Syrian culture. They were supposed to receive the same benefits and treatment as other families of soldiers killed in service of Assad's army, which include government jobs and support payments. Not only did they not get any such benefits, but instead the "award" was atrocious public services, confiscation of property from Assad's security forces ,and arrest campaigns.

In the mid- **2019** , Assad's security forces launched an arrest campaign launched inside Yalda in which dozens of young men like "Abdulrahman Hamid" and two members of his close family, who reconciled and joined in the **4th** Armored Division, an an elite formation of the Assad's army. At the end of **2019** , arrests continued and "Ali Abo Stef" who was playing a big role in reconciliation agreement of Yalda village was arrested, while at the same time properties of several Yalda families who fled Syria, which included **16** houses and dozens of pieces of land, were confiscated .

Despite the killing, arrests and marginalization which marked the **2019** , the people of Yalda entered the new year with hopes that things will improve. It was not to be. at the last week of **2019** Assad's security forces attacked Aljarmak school (operated by UNRWA for Palestinian people who fled from Al Yarmouk camp and were not allowed to return to their homes) and arrested more than **20** children aged between **12** and **16** years of age. They were taken straight from their classes, with others being arrested subsequently totalling more than **50** children who were arrested. The main reason for their arrest: Assad's photo was shredded when they were playing in their school .

Parents of children and members of the reconciliation committee of Yalda village visited the investigation headquarters where their children are kept, but were unable to see them. Their requests for children to be released were rejected and they were told that their children were connected with "ISIS" when some of them were at Al-Yarmouk camp .

Ahmad Hamza (**42**), a relative of one of the arrested children: "They are just children. They had "no idea or awareness of what is forbidden .

One of the mothers of an arrested child from Al-Yarmouk camp who now lives in Yalda said: "Here we are just a few meters from our houses to which we are not allowed to return because the government wants to build new luxurious buildings in their place. My husband is disappeared and now, amidst our poverty and freezing winter, my son is arrested and I don't know anything "about him.

Fadi Nazhat, an SACD trustee from rural of Damascus said: "The situation for Yalda's residents is very bad from many aspects. The Assad regime wants to implement the reconstruction of Al-Yarmouk in accordance with the discriminatory Law **10** , which will leave thousands of people without their homes. In addition, Yalda's families and thousands of IDPs from Al -Yarmouk camp and other areas are collectively punished with forced recruitment of their youth and awful services for their support for demonstrations prior to the "reconciliation". And now we see the " ugliest form of this collective punishment: a campaign of arrests of their children.

As the world looks away, regime's practices detailed in our reports on the fate of returnees and people from "reconciliation areas" continue with ever more increasing brutality and audacity. Now they are going after the children .