

**RUKBAN CAMP:
TRAGEDY OF THE SYRIANS
IN THE AMERICAN ZONE OF OCCUPATION**

2019

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Research Methodology

In order to independently assess the situation in Rukban camp, in June 2019, the Foundation for the Study of Democracy, a non-governmental organization, conducted a sociological survey of 248 refugees who had managed to leave the camp, as well as detailed interviews with 50 of them. Most of them had spent two to four years in Rukban, some of them had been there since its establishment. The survey of refugees was conducted in the form of interviews, the main questions were asked to the head of the family, but the answers were often given by other members of the family, both wives and adult children. In the vast majority of cases, interviews were conducted in temporary accommodation centres one or two days after they had managed to leave Rukban.



Director of the Foundation for the Study of Democracy Maxim Grigoriev: “Vehicles with refugees from Rukban camp have just arrived at the temporary accommodation centre”.

Key Conclusions of the Survey

Refugees from Rukban camp have told in detail about the structure of the camp management system. Various militant groups that prevent refugees from leaving the camp serve as the major management tool. Magavir As-Saura is the largest illegal armed group. This effectively makes Rukban a concentration camp or a prison where refugees are held hostages.

Witnesses also report that ISIS militants are openly present in the camp, as well as who exactly sells weapons of this terrorist organization. Refugees cite numerous examples of killings and beatings of camp residents by militants and tell about cases of rape and harassment of women and children. One woman interviewed told how a militant tried to rape her daughter who was then nine years old. A separate source of income for militants is the abduction of young children, who are returned to their parents only for a significant ransom. Witnesses are convinced that the artificially created disastrous situation of refugees actually pushes single women with children who lack the means to exist towards prostitution. This is in the interest of the militants, who receive regular and substantial salaries within the framework of Rukban funding.

Refugees say that drug and alcohol use is widespread among the militants, and they regularly drive the camp territory in cars and shoot into the air and at Rukban residents. Interviewees fearfully talk about the prisons in the camp itself, and even more fearfully about the prison at the American base of Al-Tanf. Former camp residents, including former militants, say all members of the armed groups have undergone military training at the U.S. base. Refugees are certain that their plight and atrocities by militants are well known at Al-Tanf. Moreover, some of them are certain that the difficult situation in Rukban camp is intentionally

supported by the U.S. to force more refugees to become militants in order to save their families from starvation.

None of the interviewees have any doubts that the camp is run by the Americans and the militants are directly subordinate to them. In support of this, they cite numerous facts, including daily meetings and meetings at the Al-Tanf base of the American command with the leaders of all militant groups, and American military training, weapons, supplies, payment of salaries, etc.

The refugees are particularly indignant at the fact that they were forcibly held in the camp, actually as hostages, because without payment of a significant ransom they could not leave it. Some people who tried to flee the camp were subjected to various punishments, including beatings and torture.

Interviewees describe in detail how the system of intimidation to keep people in detention is functioning. They say that refugees with a positive attitude towards the Syrian government are subjected to pressure, including beatings and torture, destruction of property, threats to relatives, etc. In Rukban, printed materials and announcements are regularly distributed informing that those who have left the camp are at risk of death upon entering the territory controlled by the legitimate Syrian government.

The refugees and their families say that after the terror by pro-American militants, the next most important problem for them was hunger—the lack and high cost of drinking water and food. Families interviewed said that their young children were starving and eating no more than once a day. For most of them, rice or lentils were the only food for many years, which resulted in irreversible health consequences. Former residents of Rukban say that they had an opportunity to eat bread no more than once a month. They say that only militants or those associated with them could afford to buy food and water.

The lack of medical care in Rukban resulted in the deaths of many children and adults in the camp. The refugees interviewed gave numerous examples of the deaths of their own children and relatives from illnesses that could have been successfully treated if medical care had been available. The only medical facility in the camp had no trained staff and no medication supply. Even in the case of serious illnesses, militants refused to allow refugees into the territory controlled by the Syrian government without a significant ransom. According to the estimates of refugees with medical education, 20 to 30 people die every month in Rukban from the lack of medical care.

The conditions in the camp are unsanitary, with dirt, garbage and food leftovers; on the street there are insects, rats, etc. For many years refugees have been forced to live in tents or makeshift clay structures. Thousands of children who grew up in the camp have been deprived of education, and many cannot read or write.

Almost all the refugees interviewed were unanimous in their assessment of the perpetrators of the dire situation in Rukban. They are certain that the responsibility lies with the U.S. and pro-American militants who have jointly created an atmosphere of terror, killing, beating and intimidation in the camp. They also stress the responsibility of the U.S. for the starvation and death of their children and relatives in the camp. Most of them explicitly say that the U.S. presence in Syria is illegal, and believe that the camp exists only because refugees are being forcibly held there by militants who release them only for significant ransom.

Pro-American Militants and Terrorists in Rukban Camp

Refugees describe in detail which pro-American militant and terrorist groups guard the camp and prevent them from returning to the territory controlled by the Syrian government. According to the refugees, the goal of the U.S. and its controlled militants was to ensure that none of them would return to that territory. They also testify to the propaganda and intimidation methods used to detain refugees in the camp, and to the presence of ISIS militants in the camp, citing specific names of persons supplying weapons directly from Rukban camp to their units.



Ali Half Ali Shafa (35), spent four years in Rukban camp.

The camp was guarded by militants, terrorists. Some camp residents decided to join them because of bad conditions, as they received 500–600 dollars there.

That is a lot of money. Militants drink and take drugs in the form of pills. Militants often shot and drove around in cars. If a refugee breaks their rules, they just take him away, start beating him, so that he almost dies. There were cases of them beating up old people. For example, there was some group supported by the Afghans. It attacked that person, wanted to prove to everyone that they were strong, that they did not rebel against the militants without reason, began to beat. There is a prison on the edge of the camp. Refugees try to behave in a way that does not cause any problems, so that they are not taken there. There are many such buildings where refugees are not allowed access.

Qasem Muhammad Hammud (44), three and a half years in Rukban camp.

Militants announced among refugees that those who escaped from Rukban to the territory of the Syrian State would be arrested and imprisoned. That is why many were afraid and did not go. Militants set up fences so that no one would go out.

Fahd Dahan Al-Khmedee (27), former Magavir As-Saura militant, three years in Rukban camp.

I was with Magavir As-Saura militants. They were under the command of the Americans. Those who had no money were not allowed out of Rukban and were returned to the camp.



Fuaz Awad Al-Djazi, merchant (41), spent four years in Rukban camp.

In addition to Magavir As-Saura, there are militants under the command of Raka Al-Budeine, around 70 people, there are militants under the command of Glis Abu Hamud, around 100 people, there are militants of lieutenant Abu Huss, around 100 people, there are militants of Abu Hara Rabis, 300 people, there are militants of Saeed Al-Qadur, around 60 people, he is considered to be the head of Rukban police, and others. All the groups are controlled by the Americans. The Americans have strongholds. They allow to transport weapons for ISIS from these strongholds. For instance, Mofad Al-Muhtar trades in weapons, missiles and munitions with ISIS. He takes them from Al-Tanf base. Another man, Kaha Mukda, works for ISIS intelligence. He is controlled by the Americans. These people supply ISIS. They are all in Rukban camp. There are groups and they have a lot of weapons. They buy from them and resell.

Muhammad Abdurahman (40).

Leaflets were distributed, and it was written in them not try to leave the camp and go towards the territory of the State, that they would kill, arrest and punish us there.



Ali Half Ali Shafa (35), spent four years in Rukban camp.

There were ISIS militants in the camp. People pointed at a house and said that ISIS militants lived there or that there were people there who were helping ISIS militants. These were the kind of conversations that took place between people.



Qasem Muhammad Hammud: «Militants set up fences so that no one would go out.»



Muhammad Ali Hammad (36), shepherd, spent more than two years in Rukban camp.

Naturally, there was propaganda, news and announcements that if we went to the territory of the government, we might be arrested, we would be killed.

Muhammad Abdurahman (40).

There were different militants and their different units. They came together from the desert. I saw ISIS militants in the camp, they often came.

Pharez Ali Al-Hariri (51), spent four years in Rukban camp.

Constant intimidation into not leaving the camp. They said we would be arrested and killed in the Syrian territory.

Muhammad Ali Hammad (36), shepherd, spent more than two years in Rukban camp.

Some militants are led by Muhamed Talla (Magavir As-Saura). I saw him in a vehicle with the Americans. We saw from the barracks a column of 10–15 vehicles moving along the road, half of which were Americans. The militants are under the command of the Americans. The U. S. supported them, helped them, gave them weapons and money. It conducted reconnaissance for the militants. Militants had American weapons, especially the people driving pickup trucks.



Khaled Hussein Al-Hussein (39), spent three years in Rukban camp.

The aim of the militants was to ensure that no one would return to the territory of the Syrian government. That is why they did not like it when someone spoke well about the Syrian State. There were different groups there, militant units, and scandals occurred often between them, and they often shot at each other, and civilians suffered because of that.



Muhammad Abdurahman: “Those people, militants, approached me... First they shot into the air and then they shot at me.”

Militants often went to the Americans’ base. We often saw columns of the Americans and militants. The Americans are to blame for everything. They bear full responsibility. Not only have they not helped us, they scared us through the militants into not returning to the Syrian territory. They said that as soon as we arrived in Syria, we would be killed. They would rape our women. We would be imprisoned. They spoke on the orders of the Americans.

Killings and Beatings of Refugees by Pro-American Militants

Refugees provide detailed accounts of cases of terror by militants: numerous cases of killings and beatings. They testify to the intentionality of most killings — murders were committed to intimidate the refugees, to seize their money, or in case of any discontent felt by the militants. This happened both inside and outside Rukban camp — first, militants took away some of the refugees and then killed them. But there were also accidental murders — in numerous shootings between militants or during the shooting by militants for entertainment or after the use of drugs.

Beatings of refugees were also widespread. The reason for this could be the militants' assumption that some refugee had a positive opinion about the legitimate government of Syria or told that he wanted to leave the camp for the territory under the control of the government. In case militants did not like something, they could destroy the property of suspects as an intimidation measure. Refugees say that in some cases militants not only beat people up, but also took them to prisons. Those prisons were located both on the territory of Rukban and on the territory of the American Al-Tanf base.

Fahd Dahan Al-Khmedee (27), former Magavir As-Saura militant, three years in Rukban camp.

I was with Magavir As-Saura militants. They were under the command of the Americans. Sometimes we could beat up if we did not like someone.

We mistreated people. We threatened. We could destroy property, for example, to force someone to join us. We could kill chickens or sheep, destroy something in order to make them work with us. Those who did not have money were not allowed to leave Rukban and were returned to the camp.



Khaled Abdulhan Abdullatif: “Militants fired in all directions for no reason. For whatever reason, they start shooting.”

Khaled Abdulhan Abdullatif (40), farmer, four years in Rukban camp.

Militants fired in all directions for no reason. For whatever reason, they start shooting. One killed for a garlic bulb. They began to argue about why it was so expensive. For example, it costs from 1000 liras a kilo in Rukban, and here on the territory of the government it is 200 liras. The militants began to argue, then a fight started, then they began to shoot.

Hafez Shkhada Al-Salzhan (43), spent four years in Rukban camp.

My brother’s son was murdered in the camp, he was 16 years old. Right at home. They also unlawfully took people, without any reason. They took them to Al-Tanf. Threats from militants were frequent. They often shot in the air and killed, there were different cases. Sometimes they surrounded a house and shot and killed.



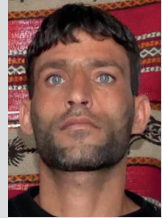


Fuaz Awad Al-Djazi (41), spent four years in Rukban camp.

Militants killed my cousin. That Nuvaif was a good man. He went to the market to buy goods, and the militants wanted to take his car. If the group knew that I had money, they would surround me, close their faces and take the money. Another man, Khasan Letgim, was arrested and killed by militants. Hanged. They knew he had money and wanted to take it. They took him somewhere, and 15 days later he was found dead. The militants said they had hanged him.

Muhammed Ahmed Shah

My mother was sitting in the yard, militants shot at her. She was immediately killed. Three bullets hit her. They shot on purpose, not by chance. We did not complain to anyone. We were afraid. All militants are the same and will not punish themselves.



Turki Muhamad Najras (43), spent three and a half years in Rukban camp.

The camp is dirty, the life there is very bad and humiliating. Militants fired shots, there was chaos everywhere in the camp. It is impossible to live there.



Faza Abdullah Al-Abdullah (34), spent four years in Rukban camp.

There were cases of militants killing people. Sometimes they kill near the house, sometimes they take a person and kill behind the camp. Such cases often happened.



Ahmad Khussein Sheehan, 22 years of age, meat seller, four years in Rukban camp.

People were taken to Al-Tanf prison. The prison at the American base. And from there they were sometimes sent to Jordan.

Yasser Ommar (39), electrician, four years in Rukban camp.

There were cases of murder. I remember once there was a conflict between one of the refugees and a militant. Then he shot and killed the man.



Ali Ahmed Muzaveh (40), handyman, spent four years in Rukban camp.

There have been a lot of conflicts between militants lately. They shot at each other, and civilians suffered from that... Militants are linked to the Americans and act on their instructions.

Muhammad Abdurahman (40).

I did all sorts of work in the camp to sustain my family's needs. I was approached by these people, militants. They told me that they knew that I pronounced myself in favour of the Syrian State. At first, I was intimidated and verbally threatened. Then I was taken, captured. They wanted to make me go with them, work with them as a militant. They took away my personal documents, my phone and my watch.

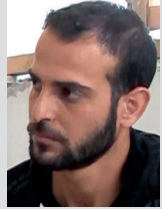


I was beaten up. I was hit, they told me bad words and started to abuse me. They shot into the air first, then they shot at me. Then two people were killed for that reason — the first was Ahmad and the second was Islam — because they did not want to work with them. Then they killed two more from Damascus.

Refugees said that we should be careful when talking. Among them were spies from militants, who collected information about who said what.

Ali Ahmad Khlef (23), medical student, spent four years in Rukban camp.

Once I was arrested, blindfolded, threatened with death. They filmed a video to use it against me, so that I would stay in the camp, so that I would not try to leave it.



They said: “We will kill you if you try to leave the camp again, and we will complain to the Americans.” I realized that they would put me in jail. They threatened with the Americans, they had a prison.

Rape of Women, Forced Prostitution and Child Abduction by Pro-American Militants

Refugees talk about cases of rape by militants. Extremely hard conditions in the camp and inability to provide food for their children also led to some women being forced to engage in prostitution. Quite often, pro-American militants kidnapped children and then returned them to their parents after receiving a significant ransom.



Fatima Hussein Jmeid, (24). Spent four years in Rukban camp.

Two years ago, I asked my daughter to bring bread from the shop. She went to the shop and a militant saw her. He asked her to go to the market with him to buy vegetables. She went, but he went another way, used another road. She asked: "Where are you going?" and she was told that was a shortcut. He went outside the camp. He stopped there and started kissing her. He almost raped her, she was nine years old then. He did not have time to rape her, other militants came, but he almost did it, another minute, and he would have raped her.

The militants who rescued her from that man filmed a video of him trying to rape her and threatened him to show that video to everyone unless he paid them money. They threatened my daughter with killing her parents if she told anyone. Militants are all the same, all beasts.

My neighbour's son was captured, he is four years old, his name is Mahmud Hasha. They paid the money and returned the boy. I heard a lot about the abduction of other children in the camp. Some militants live in the camp, they have their own houses.

They capture children, keep them in their houses and demand money for them.

There were cases of women forced into prostitution with militants for money. For money, due to hunger and poverty. Many children were born because of that.



Ali Half Ali Shafa (35), spent four years in Rukban camp.

There were a lot of cases of rape. But our religion prescribes that we should not declare it, because it is not a good thing. And those who experience that, with whom such a thing happens, do not announce it to everyone. That is considered a disgrace. That is why they hide it. There were cases of women being forced to engage in prostitution. Women were forced to do that for the sake of money, food. Many women were without husbands, they had to feed their children, to provide for them, so they had to do it.

Faza Abdullah Al-Abdullah (34), spent four years in the camp.

A lot of women got pregnant with babies of others, not of their husbands. That was due to hunger and poverty. Money was needed to feed their families.

Khaled Hussein Al-Hussein (39), spent three years in Rukban camp.

Some women sold themselves to militants because of hunger and need. Prostitution. They had to.

Forced Detention of Refugees as Hostages in Rukban Camp

Ali Half Ali Shafa (35), spent four years in Rukban camp.

There was no possibility to leave freely. We got there, thought it was Syrian territory, and it turned out that we were deceived and subsequently not allowed to leave. Many tried to leave the camp, but those who managed — they did it, and those who failed and were captured by militants — they were put in jail. Those who were seized were sometimes subjected to violence and torture.

When they were seized, after promising not to do anything like that again they were released. But if those people started to argue, tried to achieve what they wanted, to leave the camp, they were punished and tortured. For example, they were hung them from the ceiling by their feet.

There were practically no people who wanted to escape because they were afraid that shots would be fired at them.

If people wanted to leave, the price was up to 100 thousand, depending on the situation. Most people could not afford it, because there was a lack of means of subsistence.



Yasser Ommar (39), electrician, four years in Rukban camp.

It was very difficult to leave. People were forbidden to leave. It costs a lot of money to get out of there. We were simply told that it was forbidden to leave the camp — I do not know the reason. The militants forbade it.

Some managed to escape, and some failed. I did not try. I was afraid. They could beat up or kill.

To get out, I paid 50 thousand. To get out, you necessarily have to pay, otherwise they would not let you go.

We should pay 700 to get a car. Sometimes, several families pay for one car, they contribute 50–70 thousand and come up with this amount.

Abdulhan Abdullatif (40), farmer, four years in Rukban camp

We wanted to enter the territory of the government. We were told we would get arrested there, and they demanded a lot of money from us to leave. 500 thousand liras and more, and we didn't have that kind of money. A bag of flour was worth 30 thousand liras there. Even a box of pills costs here 150 liras, and there it was 1500 liras.



Abulalah Audi Al-Taleb (45), farmer, four years in Rukban camp

We had never tried to return to the territory of the government before because there was no way to pay. We got back as soon as they opened the roads and we had the chance.



Muhammad Abdurahman (40)

Fighters prevented refugees from returning to the territory under the Syrian State control. They asked for a lot of money. Sometimes 300 thousand for a person. We tried to leave the camp twice, but we got caught and were brought back to the camp.



Muhsen Al-Khali, his wife Leila Seil Al-Muhammad, three years in Rukban camp

It was impossible to leave because we didn't have the money. They asked for 150 thousand for each person. We had to pay to get out of there. This is a very large sum. We had no money.

Mahmoud Khaled Al-Saleh (38), multifunctional laborer, in Rukban camp since its creation

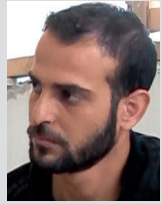
It was impossible to leave before. Fighters did not let us out. We had to pay a lot of money, it was impossible for us before. We left as soon as we got this opportunity.

Fighters were outside the camp and they often were accompanied to the Americans' base. The base is used by the Americans, and Al-Tanf is also controlled by them.



Muhsen Al-Khali: “It was impossible to leave because we didn’t have the money. We had to pay to get out of there”.

Ali Ahmad Khlef (23), student, spent four years in Rukban camp



We tried to escape from the camp three or four times and return to the territory under Syrian control. But fighters and armed groups have always prevented us from leaving the camp and made it impossible to get out of there. The first time we tried to get out of there all together, that is, my family and I. My father got sick. We tried to get out in a car, but they asked a lot of money. We didn't have a chance, fighters didn't let us out.

Later my father died. Another time, my family and I tried to leave at night. There were two fences in the camp — internal and external, we did not manage to reach the external fence because we heard shooting. They started shooting, we heard it and came back. We tried to get out in secret several times but we were caught and brought back to the camp. Fighters did not give us an opportunity to leave the camp also because I am a doctor. They wanted to keep me there. We were told not to try to leave the camp, they said that they wouldn't let us leave it.

Specifics of Rukban camp management by the United States

Refugees say that the U.S. Al-Tanf base had full knowledge of the killings, beatings, rape of women and other human rights violations that took place in the Rukban camp. They also talk about an American drone, which constantly patrols the camp and broadcasts information about what is happening. According to them, the U.S. had full control over the situation in the camp with the help of subordinate fighters, who travel to the U.S. base every day and report their activities. Former members of the pro-American illegal armed groups and refugees describe how they were trained at Al-Tanf military base and received weapons and salaries from Americans. Some of them are convinced that Americans deliberately maintained a difficult situation in Rukban camp so that “people were in need and joined the fighters”. One refugee details how some of them were arrested by the Americans in the camp, transported to the prison at Al-Tanf base, and later released after paying bribes. He also accuses Americans of organizing illegal archaeological excavations.



Fahd Dahan Al-Khmedee (27), former fighter from Magavir As-Saura group, three years in Rukban camp

I joined the militants because I was starving. I joined Magavir Al-Saura four months later after I got to the camp. They obeyed Americans. We were brought straight to Al-Tanf base, about 35 people in the group. We had military training on how to use a machine gun and how to shoot. There were M-16s. Then they paid us 300 a month. We were in charge of security. We guarded Rukban camp.

Amjad Nader Sheehan (37), student, four years in Rukban camp

The conditions are very difficult. People live in tents. Headache pills are the only medication we have. There were very hungry days. Sometimes we ate twice a day, sometimes once. I believe that Americans are guilty, they closed the roads to the camp. Prices went up right away.



Yasser Ommar (39), electrician, four years in Rukban camp

Some refugees were forced to work with fighters because of the hardship of life. They joined them just for the money. These people were gathered there and taken to Al-Tanf. They received military training. They were paid 400 US dollars a month.



Ahmad Khussein Sheehan (22), meat seller, four years in Rukban camp

The majority of those who joined the fighters did so because of hunger and to get paid, feed children and provide for their families. They were trained at Al-Tanf base. They did not recruit all of them, some were recruited, some were brought back maybe because they were unfit.

Qasim Muhammad Shahud (39), multifunctional laborer, three and a half years in Rukban camp

Fighters had American weapons and machine guns on pickup trucks. They had M-16s. Fighters were paid 400 US dollars a month and they were trained at Al-Tanf base. Fighters obey Americans, they provided them with weapons and funding. They get everything from Americans. They obey them and Americans pay them, give them weapons, as well as support them.



Pharez Ali Al-Hariri (51), spent four year in Rukban camp

The U. S. controls the area, including, of course, the fighters. Americans pay the fighters their salaries. They drove American cars and carried American weapons.



Muhammad Abdurahman Al-Khleif (36), driver, spent four years in Rukban camp

The fighters had U.S. assault rifles and were trained on the Al-Tanf base. Americans support the fighters, they gave them weapons and money, that is why they bear all the responsibility.



Fuaz Awad Al-Djazi (41), seller, spent four years in Rukban camp

There was nothing to live on, so people joined different groups. All the groups are subordinate to Americans. They were trained at Al-Tanf base and in Jordan. They are armed with American weapons. They held regular meetings with group commanders at the Americans' base. Every night, team site commanders meet with Americans. The interpreter calls them and says that they are coming. They slaughter a sheep and eat with Americans. Americans launched their drone, it flew all the time. They drove a Hammer car to the camp. I saw Americans in the cars. Sometimes Americans come accompanied by fighters and take a person away with them, then they demand 10 thousand US dollars to let this person free. They put him in prison and do not let him go as long as somebody pay for him. One time, Americans caught Khusein Al-Ali, deputy to Muhmad Abdul, in possession of 190 kg of drugs. They put him in prison for seven days and took 23 thousand US dollars. Muhmad Abdul is the biggest fighter there engaged in drugs. He is a lieutenant colonel, he escaped from the 4th Division. There are also those who dig in the ground and look for items of historical significance for Americans. They go by car and search, then they give it to Americans.

Living conditions in the camp: hunger, shortage and high cost of drinking water and food

Among problems mentioned by refugees shortage and high cost of drinking water and food follows the problem of terror by the pro-American fighters. A lot of families say their underage children starved and ate not more than once a day. Many of them would eat only rice or lentil for many years which lead to the irreversible health consequences. Many refugees say they had an opportunity to eat bread, not to mention the meat, not more than once a month. They also say fighters or those related to them had enough money to buy food and water. These commodities were supplied to the camp and sold at extremely high prices.



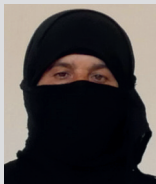
Muhammad Ali Hammad (36), shepherd, spent more than two years in Rukban camp.

The children were starving a lot. Sometimes they ate once a day. It was very hard to live there. One day there was bread, another day there was no bread. Even when there were vegetables they were extremely expensive. It was difficult for us to buy such things.



Ali Half Ali Shafa (35), spent more than three years in Rukban camp.

My wife sold water to earn some money. Together we earned about 30–35 thousand. This money was enough only for food and often we ate only once a day. There was no free food even for children. We ate only lentil and rice. Sometimes when we managed to save some money, I bought potatoes. Not every day. It was very, very, very bad in Rukban camp.



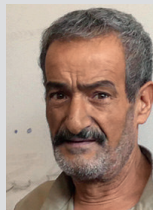
Sheila Hammoud Al-Nasa (47), spent three years in Rukban camp.

It was very hard for us to live there. There was no healthcare. The food was expensive. Only those who had money could buy it. It was difficult to live there.

Muhsen Al-Khali, Leila Seil Al-Muhammad, his wife, spent three years in Rukban.

We ate very bad. We ate meat very seldom and very little. For three years we didn't eat chicken even once. It was very expensive.

They sold water in a car, but we could not afford to buy it. We had no money for it. I had to bring it myself in jerry cans. On the border with Jordan they put up some taps to pour water. We had to go there to load some water. We had to do it with our own hands. It was very hard to live there.



Mahmoud Khaled Al-Saleh (38), multifunctional laborer, lived in Rukban since its creation.

It was very hard to live in Rukban. I have a big family, we used to eat bread once a month. Usually, we ate steamed rice, sometimes even without salt.

I have eight children — five girls and three boys. One daughter was born in Rukban, she is three. It was very hard to find food. It was very difficult to live there. We didn't have anything to cook on, we even had to burn old wheels to cook food on fire.

Sometimes people died of high temperature, of hunger. There was shortage of food. Many times we sent our children to ask rich people for food.



Living conditions in the camp: deaths of children and adults due to lack of medical assistance

The refugees tell about numerous deaths in Rukban due to lack of medical assistance. They give examples of their own children and relatives who died of diseases which could have been successfully treated with due medical assistance. Those who lived in the camp say that the only infirmary did not have trained staff or any medications. The only available means of treatment was to buy medicines supplied to the camp at a price 10–15 times higher than the usual one. The refugees say that in severe cases they tried to seek medical assistance at the infirmaries in Jordan situated near the border. Yet, they were often refused or their names were put on the waiting list and they could wait for their turn for more than a year. Even when people had severe diseases the fighters refused to let the refugees go to the territory controlled by the Syrian government without a large ransom.

All this led to a great number of deaths, in particular among children and women. According to the refugees, from 20 to 30 people die in Rukban every month.



Fuaz Awad Al-Djazi (41), spent four years in Rukban camp.

My child and nephew died as they received no medical assistance. My child was eight months and my nephew was three.

Mahmoud Khaled Al-Saleh (38), multifunctional laborer, lived in Rukban camp since its creation.

People would die. Especially children. A lot of children would die. There were no doctors in Rukban. Among my relatives three children

died. One of them was seven months, another one was two and the third one was 12 days. There were a lot of deaths. As we left the camp we spent a whole month getting treatment from diseases, dirt, and polluted air of Rukban.



Ali Ahmed Muzaveh (40), multifunctional laborer, spent four years in Rukban camp.

There were no doctors. It was possible to get treatment or to buy medicines only at your own expense. My wife had an obstetrical bleeding when she was nine months pregnant and the baby was stillborn.



Khaled Hussein Al-Hussein (39), spent three years in Rukban camp.

Our neighbours' son got sick and died. He was three. His mother was pregnant and when she found out he was dead she had a miscarriage.

Amjad Nader Sheehan (37), student, spent four years in Rukban camp.

The conditions are very bad. People live in tents. Concerning healthcare, there are only pills for headache.



Khaled Abdulhan Abdullatif (40), farmer, spent four years in Rukban camp.

My mother died in Rukban. She got sick and there were no hospitals or the possibility to get medical help there. Nobody consulted us. In Jordan there is an infirmary. We went there. They did not consult us. Americans help only those who work with them and they don't care about others. They follow the fighters.



Muhammad Abu Al-Hamid Suod (45), spent four years in Rukban camp.

Hamid Hari's mother died in Rukban. We sought medical assistance but the queue there was long. We put her name on the list but she never got help as she died, and she had waited for assistance for about a year. To go to the territory of their government one should have money and they didn't have it. 350 thousand liras per family. Even if a person is sick it doesn't matter... Once fighters killed a man. Shot him in the head. Everyone saw it.



Turki Muhamad Najras (43), spent three and a half years in Rukban camp.

My relative lost a child in the camp, he was seven months. His father's name was Farhad. There was no opportunity to transport the baby to the hospital. They went to the infirmary. But it was useless. Medical assistance is not provided there. They tried to transport the baby to the territory of the government but they failed. They could not afford to pay.



Mahmud Muhamad Ashahud (51), peasant, spent four years in Rukban camp.

My brother and grandson died in the camp.

Abulalah Audi Al-Taleb (45), farmer, spent four years in the camp.

My two cousins Muhammed Hashi Al-Tali and Muhammed Trad Al-Tali died in the camp. The first one died of internal bleeding. The other one was blown up on a landmine. There are minefields there.





Pharez Ali Al-Hariri (51), spent four years in Rukban.

My uncle died in Rukban. He had good health before he got to the camp.

There is no healthcare in Rukban, there is nowhere to seek medical assistance. There is an infirmary but it is only called this way, they don't provide medical assistance there. We wanted to go to the Syrian territory many times but we couldn't do that as we didn't have money. We didn't have an opportunity to pay a lot. And they told us that the roads were closed and it was dangerous there.

Qasem Muhammad Hammud (44), spent three and a half years in Rukban.

My brother's wife died there. Her name was Nurf Al-Mat. There is no healthcare in the camp. They tried to leave the camp for the territory of the Syrian government. But they were asked to give a lot of money for leaving the camp. 200 thousand per person.



Faza Abdullah Al-Abdullah (34), spent four years in Rukban camp.

Healthcare situation in the camp is very bad. It so happened that a car hit me. I spent the whole year in bed. It was prohibited to leave for Syria as well as to leave the territory of the camp. If somebody wanted to leave, he/she should pay a lot of money... many people died as there were no medicines and they didn't receive any treatment.

Ali Half Ali Shafa (35). Wife — Fatima Ali AbdAlah, daughters — Nasrin, Hanin, Khaliyaf and Jasmine.

There is an infirmary but it is not enough to provide assistance to those who live in Rukban camp. If you were sick you had to wait for

your turn. Unless the queue got fit, people died. May Allah rest their souls. I know there was a man whose name was Wahit, he had a heart disease and he died before his queue got fit. Drawing on the experience of our fathers, mothers and grandfathers we healed ourselves.



Yasser Ommar (39), electrician, spent four years in Rukban camp.

There were some medical centers in the camp, they were very primitive, sometimes without doctors. Medical assistance was very bad. Many people had skin diseases, sore throat, asthma, they coughed. They didn't give anything for free, we had to buy medicines ourselves and they cost a lot there. My mother has been suffering from a skin disease, she didn't get treatment as she could not afford it, we had problems with money and couldn't transport her here.



Ahmad Khussein Sheehan (22), meat seller, spent four and a half years in Rukban camp.

My relative died, she should have left to get the treatment. Her name was Kgadija Ibrahim Najla, she is my uncle's wife. It was prohibited to leave for the territory of the Syrian government to get assistance, the fighters prohibited it. We wanted to transport her to Jordan to get treatment there, but they did not admit her there. She died.

Walid Hamud Shihan (29), farmer, spent four and a half years in Rukban camp.

My mother died in the camp. If she had managed to get to the hospital, she would have been alive. They did not let us go. It is Americans to blame for keeping us there and for not giving an opportunity to leave the camp.



Living conditions in the camp – insanitary conditions, lack of proper lodging, electricity, education for children

The refugees tell about insanitary conditions in the camp, about dirt, rubbish and food leftovers in the streets, about insects, rats, stray dogs, etc. For many years, the refugees kept in the camp by force by pro-American fighters had to live in tents or in self-made clay buildings. Thousands of children who grew up in the camp were deprived of an opportunity to get education, many of them cannot even read or write.

Ali Ahmad Khlef (23), spent four years in Rukban camp.

The situation in the camp can be described as completely insanitary, the streets are full of dirt, food leftovers, rubbish and there are animals and rats in the camp. Animals transmitted infectious diseases. Flies caused skin diseases; in particular, it concerns children.



Qasim Muhammad Shahud, (39), multifunctional laborer, spent three and a half years in Rukban camp.

It was very hard, very difficult to live in the camp. There was lack of medical assistance and food supplies; there was no authority, there was dirt and rubbish.

Americans should of course be accountable and responsible for Rukban. They didn't provide any assistance to us.





Ali Half Ali Shafa (35), spent four years in the Rukban Camp.

There were rats, dogs and all kinds of insects in the camp. As for garbage, it was thrown away right by the house — there was no dump site. Insects were all over the place — lice, fleas.

There was no electricity. At first, we lived in tents, but later on walls of clay were built. Those were covered with tent cloth; the structures were very flimsy. When it was storming and the wind was blowing, the walls, the whole houses — those improvised shelters made of clay — collapsed with people sleeping in them.

My daughter is 11 years old. But she doesn't know how to write. She can neither write nor read; she doesn't know the letters.

Syrian refugees' opinions regarding the United States' responsibility for the crimes in the Rukban Camp

More than 50 interviewed refugees concur in their opinion as to who bears the blame for their plight in the Rukban Camp. According to them, the responsibility lies with the United States and pro-American fighters, who created the atmosphere of terror, with killings, abuse and intimidation. The refugees directly say that it is the United States that is responsible for people's starving and dying. Majority of them openly say that they had long wanted to leave for the territory under control of the legitimate Syrian government but had been forcibly held at the camp as hostages, a considerable ransom demanded from them for their release.

They emphasize that the U.S. presence in the Syrian territory is unlawful and has led to a significant number of deaths at the camp — both at the hands of fighters and because of the lack of medical care — in conditions of forcible detention. A medical student who spent more than 4 years in the camp believes that the number of deaths amounted to 20–30 refugees monthly. Those who lived in the Rukban Camp think that Americans could have provided the camp with the necessary supplies but, on the one hand, did not want to and, on the other hand, did not let the refugees to leave the camp and close it. Some of them believe that the appalling living conditions were created deliberately in order to force the needy to join the illegal armed formations.

Ali Ahmad Khlef (23), student; spent four years in the Rukban Camp.

From 20 to 30 people died every month. Diseases, famine, lack of medical care. If decent medical aid had been provided, more than half of the dead could have survived... There were many cases of malnutrition, especially among children — almost 40–50 per cent. Only those who worked with the fighters could eat and live well.

In some cases they knew that people had serious illnesses and had to get out to receive proper treatment. But they wouldn't let them out. The United States bear the full responsibility for the appalling living conditions that prevailed in the camp. Their presence is illegal. They control the area and therefore have to be held accountable for everything.



Muhamad Jasem Al-Jasem (51); spent three years in the Rukban Camp.

The Americans are to blame. They could have helped but, instead, they didn't give anything, didn't provide any help whatsoever. We suffered. We starved. A guy I knew died in that camp. His name was Khaled Shakhada.



Qasim Muhammad Shahud (39), unskilled worker; spent three and a half years in the Rukban Camp.

The life in the Rukban Camp was difficult, unbearable. Medical care and food supplies were inadequate. There was no governance; dirt and litter were all around.

Of course, it is the Americans that are to be held accountable and responsible for the Rukban Camp. They didn't provide any help.



Abulalah Audi Al-Taleb (45), farmer; spent four years in the camp.

Had the Americans wanted to, they would have provided food and medical care for the refugees, but they didn't.

Qasem Muhammad Hammud (44); spent three and a half years in the camp.

The Americans were in charge of the camp; they used fighters. They are to blame. Especially as regards the safety of children. Parents couldn't leave their kids walking around and playing freely in the camp because it just was not safe. Fighters would often open fire. They had conflicts every once in a while and would fire into the air, and the bullets could end up hitting somebody's boy or a girl.

At some point, the Americans closed the roads. They even shut the water off. They did everything to make people desperate so they would join the armed formations.



Main findings of the sociological survey conducted among 248 refugees from the Rukban Camp

The survey was conducted by the Foundation for the Study of Democracy, a non-governmental organization, at centers for temporary accommodation of refugees on 27–28 June 2019. It was carried out among 248 respondents who had previously lived in 43 settlements of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Before coming to the Rukban Camp, the surveyed refugees had lived in the settlements of Abu Hanaya, Abu Kamal, Ad-Dumair, Ain al-Nisr, Al Badia, Al-Ameria, Al-Arman, Al-Bayda, Al-Dar, Al-Hashimia, Al-Huash, Al-Karim, Al-Karyatein, Al-Kasara, Al-Nabatia, Al-Rastan, Al-Saen, Al-Sien, Al-Tifor, Baalbe, Baba Amr, Bab-Asba, Damascus, Eastern Ghouta, Hasiyah, Homs, Jandar, Jeb al-Jarreh, Jubb al-Jarrah, Khan al-Riyad, Kharan al-Adamad, Khi-Khabara, Khuarin, Marhatan, Mheen, Palmyra, Rahum, Rastan, Rif Dimashq, Salamiyah, Tel-Addai, Tel-Hassan, Tifor, etc.

The overwhelming majority of the respondents (88.6%) were men. Two-thirds of the surveyed refugees (65.3%) were 25 to 54 years old, almost one-fourth (23.9%) were young people under 24 years old, and 10.6% of the respondents were aged over 55.

15.1% of the respondents had first-hand information of cases of murder, abuse and torture in the Rukban Camp. 7.7% of the respondents mentioned cases of rape and harassment of women in the camp.

Almost one-third (30.5%) of the surveyed refugees noted that they had become eyewitnesses to the death of their relatives or acquaintances in the Rukban Camp. 43.3% said that their relatives, acquaintances or themselves had suffered from this or that disease while at the Rukban Camp.

Besides, one in four (25.2%) respondents pointed out that they had personally been subjected to intimidation or pressure at the camp because of their positive attitude towards the legitimate authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic and their desire to leave the camp.

Nearly one-fourth of the respondents (23.8%) told about attempts to recruit refugees into the fighters' ranks.

Annex

A Name List of 248 Respondents

- Abdo Qasem Suleiman
- Abdul Kafi Ibragim Al-Qasem
- Abdul Rahman Qasem Al-Muhammed
- Abdul Razzaq Nureddin Bakkur
- Abdulhadi Nadir Hadi
- Abdulilah Mahmud Sabra
- Abdullah Muhammed Al-Marei
- Abdulmutseim Mjbeil Faher
- Abulalah Audi Al-Taleb
- Adnan Ammar Hudir
- Adnan Haled Ksevan Al-Masri
- Adnan Shahuda Addarush
- Aed Sbeh Al-Lahluh
- Ahlam Khaled Al-Salti
- Ahmad Hussein Sheehan
- Ahmad Jumaa Shahin
- Ahmad Muhammed Al-Ubed
- Ahmed Abdul Aziz Al-Hammoud
- Ahmed Abdul Rahman Al-Qaed
- Ahmed Abdul Razuf Al-Qasem
- Ahmed Abdurahman Muhammad
- Ahmed Aed Sraa
- Ahmed Darvishi Daraushi
- Ahmed Hamad Hamad
- Ahmed Hasan Al-Hasan
- Ahmed Huayan Al-Shkhab
- Ahmed Hussein Favaz Husein Hujra
- Ahmed Hussein Muhammed
- Ahmed Khaled Al-Said
- Ahmed Muhammed Ahmed
- Ahmed Muhammed Shahur
- Ahmed Mustafa Rueshdi
- Aina Huussein Balaas
- Ajil Hamad Ali
- Alaa Khaled Al-Shredi
- Alaa Muhammed Ahmed
- Alaa Muhammed Al Hamed
- Ali Adnan Muhammad
- Ali Ahmad Khlef
- Ali Ahmed Khalid
- Ali Ahmed Muzaveh
- Ali Khalf Ali Shafa
- Ali Muaffaq Ammar
- Ali Shlil Al-Ahmed
- Amed Abdullah Hamis
- Amer Ramadan Hever
- Amira Abdullah Al-Hamadi
- Amjad Nader Sheehan
- Asma Ahmed Pharez
- Atallah Muhammed Al-Gosh
- Atama Sameh Al-Hammada
- Awad Ali Al-Hudir
- Awad Audi Al-Taleb
- Azi Ahmet Al-Atbali
- Bashar Halifa Ilavi
- Basma Farhan Matir
- Bushra Ali Haua
- Dabes Hudr Al-Asvad
- Dammam Saiakh Al-Asiad
- Davud Suleiman Rfai
- Deph Alla Ahmed Hamad
- Djadkhar Medsher Al-Hmedi
- Eta Shretikh Al-Saud
- Faez Husein Al-Husein
- Fahd Dahan Al-Khmedee
- Faiz Husein Al-Husein
- Farez Ali Al-Hariri
- Farhan Husein Mansur
- Fater Zen Al-Omar
- Fatima Ahmet Al-Shkhada
- Fatima Ali Abdullah
- Fatima Hussein Jmeid
- Fatima Mansur Al-Asad
- Favaz Hasan Al-Muzuk
- Favaz Jasem Al-Saluj
- Favaz Juma Ali Abdallah

- Favaz Khaled Al-Temis
- Faza Abdallah Al-Abdallah
- Feisal Salekh Al-Fadjr
- Fuaz Awad Al-Djazi
- Gaida Khaled Al-Qasem
- Hadija Fajsal Hammeda
- Hadija Farhan Al-Minar
- Hafez Shkhada Al-Salzhan
- Halida Talji Al-Derbas
- Halluf Halaf Laili
- Hamad Shaman
- Hamed Naser Matar
- Hanan Mahmud Al-Mhemad
- Harbi Muhammed Al-Mansur Al Rahia
- Hasan Ali Al-Bulaas
- Hasan Al-Muhammed Abdul Hamid
- Hasan Hanaed Al-Derbas
- Hasan Muhammed Al-Muhammed
- Hasara Sadaq Al-Umar
- Hashad Uahib Al-Ahmed
- Hasshem Ibragim Hmedi
- Hend Jihad Al-Anbar
- Hisham Adnan Sobra
- Hmet Muhammed Al-Jasim
- Husein Ali Hlal
- Husein Farhud Amyan
- Husein Muhammed Al-Saleh
- Husein Suleiman Al-Havash
- Husniya Hammoud Al-Muhammed
- Ibragim Khalaf Hmedi
- Ida Muhamad Suleiman
- Ikhlas Muhammed AlAied
- Instisar Suleiman Bejar
- Ismail Mustafa Ismail
- Issa Jumaa Shahin
- Jaiz Qalfash Hatil
- Jalyal Muhammed Al-Shibli
- Jasmin Husein Al-Ahmed
- Jeiam Khlaia Al-Qatash
- Jihad Muhammed Al-Hasan
- Julia Suleiman Bejar
- Jumaa Ashiya Shalkhub
- Jusef Zib Ahmed
- Kasem Muhammad Hammud
- Kasem Muhammad Shahud
- Khaled Abdul Munem Al-Baed
- Khaled Abdulhan Abdullatif
- Khaled Al-Yasef Hamid
- Khaled Atiya Al-Qosh
- Khaled Ayash Khmed
- Khaled Fajer Al-Fajer
- Khaled Halaf Al-Fkes
- Khaled Halif Al-Dueshen
- Khaled Hlif Al-Aed
- Khaled Husein Hasan
- Khaled Hussein Al-Hussein
- Khaled Mahmud Al-Salama
- Khaled Mubarak Ibragim
- Khaled Muhammed Al-Hilyavi
- Khaled Muhammed Qashaam
- Khaled Naser Al-Abdullah
- Khaled Naser Al-Khamed
- Khaled Taisir Al-Dud
- Leyla Sale Al-Muhammad
- Madkhi Khalaf Al-Umar
- Mahmoud Khaled Al-Saleh
- Mahmud Awad Al-Saleh
- Mahmud Muhamad Ashahud
- Mahran Ahmed Al-Salabi
- Mashhoud Saleh Suleiman
- Mfaddi Abdul Hamid Al-Hamad
- Miyassar Khaled Asad
- Mouvafaq Muhammed Abdul Latif
- Muataz Abdul Khakim Al-Rufai
- Muhamad Jasem Al-Jasem
- Muhammad Abdurahman
- Muhammad Abdurahman Al-Khleif
- Muhammad Abu Al-Hamid Suod
- Muhammad Ali Hammad
- Muhammad Daham Hmedi

- Muhammad Deri Al-Husein
- Muhammad Halaf Al-Derbas
- Muhammad Khaled Qasham
- Muhammad Qasim Al-Zorbi
- Muhammed Abdul Qarim Al-Shbeli
- Muhammed Abdul Rahman Al-Fahed
- Muhammed Abdul Razzak Qarman
- Muhammed Abed Al-Qarim Najla
- Muhammed Ahmad Al-Shelbi
- Muhammed Ahmed Al-Qasem
- Muhammed Ahmed Al-Shkhab
- Muhammed Ahmed Faja
- Muhammed Ahmed Sabah Khaeb
- Muhammed Ahmedshah
- Muhammed Akram Ahmed
- Muhammed Ali Al-Saud
- Muhammed Ali Hamad
- Muhammed Audi Al-Taleb
- Muhammed Feisal Al-Abdullah
- Muhammed Hamada Al-Taeia
- Muhammed Jadaan Al-Dandal
- Muhammed Jamal Al-Abd Al-Rahim
- Muhammed Qasem Uvabi
- Muhammed Raddan Al-Hamoud
- Muhammed Rahil Al-Khlef
- Muhammed Salah Al-Halkat
- Muhammed Saleh Al-Fajer
- Muhammed Zahra Al-Zetera
- Muhsen Al-Khali
- Muhsen Muffdi Al-Haled
- Muhumed Isa Meshan
- Munzer Turki Al-Zuebi
- Musa Qasem Al-Shalil
- Musab Muhammed Al-Saleh
- Mustafa Abdallah Suleiman
- Mustafa Fuad Jumma
- Mustafa Mutlak Al-Mutlak
- Nader Juman Al-Abdullah
- Najah Ahmed Abdul Latif
- Nasem Akil Al-Abdullah
- Naser Muhammad Shahoud
- Nasib Abdul Hadi Al-Rfai
- Navasif Nader Ali
- Nihan Abdul Hamid Turfa
- Nur Ahman Sheehan
- Nur Al-Huda Abdul Rahman Hamad
- Pamer Ali Shahdo Ajaj
- Pharez Ahmed Muhammed
- Qamal Hasan Saleh
- Qusai Ali Al-Ahmed
- Rakad Ali Halil
- Rama Mahmud Mahmud
- Rasha Abdul Hakim Al-Qasem
- Sabah Ukla Al-Naklan
- Said Qasem Al-Ammuri
- Saleh Fajer Al-Hamus
- Saleh Salltan Al-Hmedi
- Samer Talyal Al-Hlei
- Samih Jasin Aga
- Satash Uaha Al-Ahmad
- Saud Afar Al-Fajr
- Shadl Muhammed Al-Hamade
- Sheila Hammoud Al-Nasa
- Shkhada Tuerash Al-Noi
- Subhi Ahmed Al-Gosh
- Sumaya Ibargim Al-Shihada
- Suzan Abdul Ilah Sabra
- Taisir Khaled Asad
- Talyal Abdo Hbejan
- Tamer Derbas Al-Derbas
- Turki Muhamad Najras
- Udai Ali Al-Ahmad
- Uirin Jab Qasem
- Ukla Khaled Al-Frej
- Umar Adnan Sabri
- Umar Khaled Turkmani
- Usama Atiya Al-Qosh
- Walid Ahmed Al-Ahmed
- Walid Hamud Sheehan

- Walid Muhammed Al-Shabbaq
- Warda Muhammed Warnr
- William Atia Al-Gosh
- Yara Fleh Hamad
- Yased Ommar
- Yasin Ali Al-Fahed
- Yasin Muhammed Hindi
- Yasser Muhammad Al-Ahmad
- Zaiad Attalla Shkhade
- Zakhra Hasan
- Zeid Jasin Qarraz
- Zeinab Ahmed Favez
- Ziiad Mahmud Al-Bahit