

THE WHITE HELMETS: FACT-CHECKING BY EYEWITNESSES AND FORMER VOLUNTEERS

THE FOUNDATION
FOR THE STUDY
OF DEMOCRACY

Methods of FACT-CHECKING

For the purpose of fact-checking, more than 100 Syrian eyewitnesses of the following categories were interviewed:

- members of the White Helmets;
- former fighters from illegal armed groups and
- terrorist groups;
- people living in the areas controlled by terrorist groups and armed groups where the White Helmets operated;

Each interview was videotaped and made fully accessible to the public.

Moreover, a sociological survey was conducted with the help of volunteers in Aleppo and Dera'a (more than 500 residents were interviewed in each city).

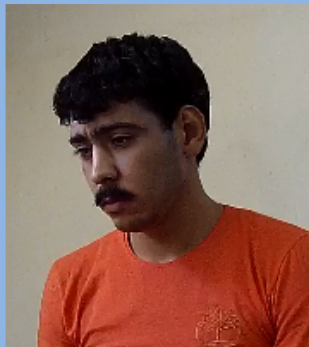


Photos: sociological survey in Aleppo

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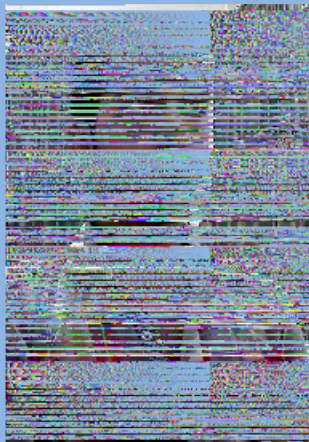
THE WHITE HELMETS: NEITHER NEUTRAL NOR VOLUNTEERS



Mohamed Baha Al-Shihadi, member of the White Helmets:

"All members of this Organization received money - there were no activists working for free. Abdul Neulu, one of the leaders of the White Helmets in Aleppo, regularly visited us, always saying that we should work well if we wanted the funding to continue."

Aiman Al-Haj Omar: *"The White Helmets generally joined just for the sake of money in order to receive humanitarian aid. It was very hard to survive."*



Mohamed Bashir Biram, member of the White Helmets: *"When fighters took eastern Aleppo under their control, I was thrown into a Jabhat Al-Nusra prison and was beaten. In prison I was given time to decide whether to join Jabhat al-Nusra or the White Helmets. If I had not accepted one of the two options, they would have killed me ... Once in the White Helmets, I arbitrarily left the organization seeking to evacuate my father, whom I took to Al-Bayan hospital that cooperated with the White Helmets. Since my father was not a fighter, the doctors in the hospital refused to help him and he died. The White Helmets threatened me and took half of my salary as a punishment for leaving the Organization for the purpose of evacuation without a*

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Hatem Uyn, aged 31, former member of the Internal Security Service of the Jaysh al-Islam illegal armed group: *"From 2014 to the end of 2017, I was working in the Jaysh al-Islam Internal Security Service. I conveyed the instructions given by the leaders of the Internal Security Service to the White Helmets. If I did not have time, I made phone calls. If I had time, I sent an official paper on the Jaysh al-Islam letterhead signed by Bashir Sheikh ad-Deayea Abu Abdul, Head of the Internal Security Service of Jaysh al-Islam in Eastern Ghouta. The White Helmets in the Jaysh al-Islam districts were under their full control."*

Abdulmunam Faiz Al-Alush, member of the White Helmets:

"Sometimes we did not have missions at all, sometimes – only one per day. Amir Abu Mohammed, coordinator of several armed groups, radioed us to give instructions to go on missions. We told him to go to people 27 military code."

The White Helmets were by no means a "group of volunteers." Almost all its members were permanent employees with a monthly salary (cash and food), for the sake of which they joined the organization seeking to save their families from hunger. The White Helmets were militarized; the heads of the centers often threatened their employees with weapons and murder if the latter refused to perform tasks that were regularly and directly received from terrorist or armed groups.

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FAKE-NEWS AND STAGED RESCUES

SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF FAKE NEWS SPREAD BY THE WHITE HELMETS



In this report the White Helmets stated that the Syrian troops had attacked the Jub al-Quba district of Aleppo. Mohamed Said exposed there the White Helmets' propaganda :
“I saw with my own eyes what had happened 100 meters from my house. People wanted to pass through the corridor in the Tariq al-Bab district to the government territory. The fighters prohibited them from leaving that territory, but the civilians refused to obey, following which the fighters attacked the crowd of people with mines... The members of the White Helmets did not save anyone. On the contrary they just took their gold and money.”

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In this report the White Helmets stated that the Syrian troops had attacked the Jisr al-Haj in the district of Aleppo. Abduljabar Bodaka, member of the White Helmets, describes there how he personally took part in the filming of this staged rescue: *"In summer 2015, I received an order by radio to go to Jisr al-Haj. There were crashed cars, the fighters lit the garbage and brought the dead people taken from the morgue and the wounded taken from the hospital to the filming location. Everything was videotaped. It was a staging. A few days after the end of the filming, every participant received a reward in the amount of 50 dollars."*

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Radvan Hasera says: *"The staging by the White Helmets was going to start, I stood on the balcony and saw everything. I saw a plastic bucket of paint which the White Helmets used to paint them (people) and then made a video. They pretended that the Syrian authorities had shelled the district which the White Helmets had begun evacuating. The building was without a roof*



and they themselves destroyed one of the walls" The White Helmets said that the Syrian troops had attacked their cars. Mohamed Saber, member of the White Helmets in Saqba, says: *"Two cars collided at Horshi Street ... The White Helmets filmed it and said that the Syrian army had destroyed them in order to receive money."*

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FAKE NEWS BY THE WHITE HELMETS ON THE USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

- Suleiman Mohamed Darwish, member of the White Helmets in Saqba: *“People from the White Helmets were working, some in gas masks, others in gauze masks. We were told that a helicopter had dropped a gas cylinder. In that case it should have been damaged, but it wasn’t. The cylinder was intact.”*
- Abdurozak Nassan: *“Members of the White Helmets were at the site with no gas masks on. They gathered people from the neighborhood, poured water over them, and started shouting that the regime had used chemical weapons.”*
- According to Ahmad Zaino Mohamed from Aleppo, fighters had warned that chemical weapons would be used, and the next day the White Helmets started to *“pour water on the street and wash it. People lay down, and water was poured over them. In reality chlorine was not used.”*
- Omar Al-Mustafa: *“I saw them bring children who were alive, put them on the floor as if they had died in a chemical attack. They put gas masks on people and poured water over them.”*

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- Abduljabar Bodaka, member of the White Helmets, says that the *"White Helmets centers in Aleppo had a special group that arrived to the filming location beforehand and prepared it – brought dead bodies and injured people from the hospitals, set tires and trash on fire, used drones for filming."*
- According to Abdulkarim Said Ahmad, member of the White Helmets in Kafr Batna, in Eastern Ghouta the White Helmets have a *"special team of about 20 people to film staged rescues."*
- Suleiman Mohamed Darwish, member of the White Helmets, says that the White Helmets Office for Eastern Ghouta *"requested fabricated information every two days, and their center had a special information room for the production of false information headed by Abdulkarim Al-Hafi, Jabhat Al-Nusra fighter."*
- Husein Talal Hajiko of the White Helmets Office for Eastern Ghouta told us that he witnessed the head of the White Helmets Information Office of the White Helmets Office for Eastern Ghouta *"instruct children to denounce the Syrian government in exchange for a good meal"*

Multiple witnesses prove that the production of fake news and staged rescues was a constant element of the White Helmets' work.

- According to Omar Al-Mustafa, footage filmed by the White Helmets *"was sent to a special center to add sound recorded after the events took place."*

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FRAUD, THEFT OF ORGANS AND VALUABLES



Ahmad Al-Omar, head of nursing staff at Ibn Rushd Hospital, Aleppo: *"The White Helmets took my neighbor who had worked as a driver to Turkey for treatment. When they brought his corpse back from Turkey, I helped to carry the body. The corpse was very light – 30 to 45 kilograms. I have known him for a long time. He weighed about 70 kilograms. I lifted the sheet and saw a large wound cut from the throat to stomach. The skin almost touched his back. I have a medical degree, I*



Amal Adhino, Aleppo, mother of a boy whose organs were removed. "Behind the" hospital there was a tent where they kept corpses, and I saw my son there. A member of the White Helmets said I was not allowed to see him. After a while they let me see him, but all wrapped up, and they only let me look at his neck and head. Everybody here knows that his organs were removed. I have applied to the hospital several times to collect his body, and the last time they threatened me and said they could kill me."

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Omar Al-Mustafa, aged 41, owner of a small business: *“People evacuated by the White Helmets often did not come back alive. For example, a person receives a minor injury, is rescued, evacuated, and then brought back with their stomach cut open and with their internal organs missing. I heard that a little girl was injured. They took her to Turkey and brought back in three days, dead and with no internal organs. People were scared. When someone got injured, they were afraid to call the White Helmets and ask for help.”*

Abdurozak Nassan, former Ahrar Al-Sham member: *“Members of the White Helmets arrived after shellings. I asked people whose wounded relatives had been taken to Turkey, and they said that the corpses were brought back without some of the organs. In Ahrar Al-Sham, I worked under Shadi Kadik, codename Abu Adel Al Halabi. I asked him why they came back with their organs removed after hospitalization in Turkey. He said they did it on purpose to provide treatment to their fighters.”*

A large body of evidence allows for a clear conclusion that the White Helmets centers were a key element in the system of forced removal of human organs.



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Ali Mohamed Al-Mardini, former Jaysh al-Islam member: *"The house of a rich family on Sahat al Jamiya square in Saqba was shelled. In the course of the rescue, the White Helmets took away a bag with money and gold. I saw it with my own eyes. Once a shell fell on a gold store in Quwatli street. After the White Helmets went there, 60 thousand USD, as well as 1.5 million Syrian pounds*



and some gold, disappeared." Omran Makia, aged 21, member of the White Helmets in Douma: *"Sometimes we came to help, entered a flat, and, if we found gold or jewelry, seized it. In one flat, there was a woman who felt ill, we came to help her, found some gold and stole it."*



Mohamed Al-Nassan, aged 49: *"Once the shells fell near a mosque, a woman was robbed and abandoned. The White Helmets wanted to help the injured woman, but then they saw gold jewelry on her arms. So they took it all off and left without giving her any help."*

Multiple witnesses say that it was common for members of the White Helmets to rob the wounded, especially women, as well as steal from stores and buildings damaged in shellings.

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Saif Ad-Din Khubia, physician, Douma:

"The head of the White Helmets in Douma, Mohamed Masarwi Abu Salama was a corrupt official. He earned a lot of money, and bought cars and summer houses for himself. Mohamed Masarwi was very famous and rich. He hid his money on one of the farms, and when the Syrian Army launched the offensive, he wanted to get the money he had

no, but Udaysh al-Islam militants killed him.

Suleiman Mohamed Darwish, member of the White Helmets in Saqba: "Heads of the White Helmets center stole a lot of money. Once we installed a crane on a car. One piece for this car was worth 100,000 Syrian pounds. They wrote off one million. Another one: they reported they had bought a new minibus, but instead they upgraded the old one. I know that at one moment our center received 4,300 dollars for diesel and gasoline, but only 1,000 dollars was spent for that purpose."



Members of the White Helmets give detailed accounts of the exact mechanics of the extensive system of corruption and theft among sponsors in the organization.

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THE WHITE HELMETS: DESTRUCTIVE AND INCOMPETENT

Nur Al-Farhan, aged 12, pupil in the Gaza school, Aleppo, describes how the White Helmets entered her school: *“They got everybody out of the school and said that there would no longer be any lessons. If you want to learn, go to the Mosque. Since we were not able to go to the school and we went to the Mosque.”*



Nuha Mohamed Al-Naja, Director of the kindergarten occupied by the White Helmets: *“Children aged 1 to 6 attended our kindergarten as the White Helmets and fighters occupied it in 2011. The children could no longer attend it.”*



Bassam Az Ad-Din Hadi Al-Najib, an opposition journalist, who worked with the White Helmets: *“Roughly 10 centers out of those 26, which operated in Eastern Ghouta, were located in schools and 1 center – in the kindergarten. They prohibited children learning in the schools.”* **Occupation of schools and kindergartens with pupils and children forced them to leave the buildings. Teachers were given the orders under the penalty of death to send them to religious schools – a standard practice of the White Helmets which had a devastating impact on the Syrian educational system.**

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Ramadan Kurdi , who has been a fireman for more than 25 years, told us: *“I was a Chief of the fire-fighting center in Aleppo. The Syrian government financed us and paid for everything and we worked even when the fighters came. One day three people came to announce that this building would be taken for the White Helmets... They imprisoned me, and the Chief of the White Helmets center was at my interrogation ... I*



... I did not have money and went to Latakia”
Mouammed Bashir Baram, White Helmets member in Aleppo:
“There were 15 vehicles in my center. The majority of them was not used, they were held in reserve.”

Omran Makia, White Helmets member in Douma: “Although I had never received medical training, I was responsible for helping the wounded. I have no skills, I have not completed school.”

The White Helmets destroyed an efficient state fire-fighting system and made an attempt to replace it with their own, which aimed at self-advertising and performed poorly, consisted of gunmen and incompetent people who indulged in theft.

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THE WHITE HELMETS AS A ENGINEERING, MEDICAL AND RATIONS UNITS OF ARMED GROUPS AND TERRORISTS

Ahmad Buweidani, White Helmets member in Douma: *“We constructed earthen mounds, dug trenches, transported fighters, weapons and ammunition for the fighters. For instance, we dug trenches in the towns of Mesraba and al-Shaifuniya and constructed an earthen mound.”*

Mohamed Saber, White Helmets member in Saqba : *“Our White Helmets center used its bulldozer to dig positions for the fighters and to construct earthen mounds. The White Helmets members also took part in digging tunnels. They helped to set up positions for the fighters in the towns of al-Salhia, Utaya, al-Rihan, al-Shaifuniya, Mesraba.”*

There is overwhelming evidence which proves that the White Helmets centers were permanently engaged in building fortifications for battle positions for terrorist and illegal armed groups who had been supplying them with water and food and evacuating wounded terrorists from the front line.



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THE WHITE HELMETS: PART-TIME JOB FOR MEMBERS OF TERRORISTS GROUPS AND MEMBERS OF ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS



Zakaria Mustafa, Aleppo: *“Omar Sheihu Farhodi was a sniper in the Alaa al-Hadrami Mosque and a White Helmets member at the same time. He walked freely with a rifle on the broad street in our district Sahur. All residents and I saw it ourselves. It was he who arrested me and had been holding me in the Saif Mohamed*

Shobak family members, originally from the town of Hama, also worked for the White Helmets. They worked for the White Helmets as well as for the Ahrar al-Sham militia. One day they arrested me, took me to a cellar and started to beat me.”



Omar Al-Mustafa: *“Almost all people who worked in the nearby White Helmets centers were Al-Nusra fighters or were linked to them. I tried to join the White Helmets myself, but I was told that if I was not from Al-Nusra, they could not employ me. Every person who came to the White Helmets center in our district had a document certificated by the Al-Nusra Sharia Committee. One had to be a fighter to get a recommendation from Al-Nusra in order to join the White Helmets. A lot of White Helmets members participated in hostilities and storms.”*

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Bassam Az Ad-Din Hadi Al-Najib, aged 31, an opposition journalist who worked with the White Helmets: *“After Eastern Ghouta was divided into sectors, groups ensured that their members joined the White Helmets in each sector. Each White Helmets center was subordinate to the group which held control over the area. Feilaq al-Rahman was in the central sector, Jaysh al-Islam – in the northern. Leaders of*

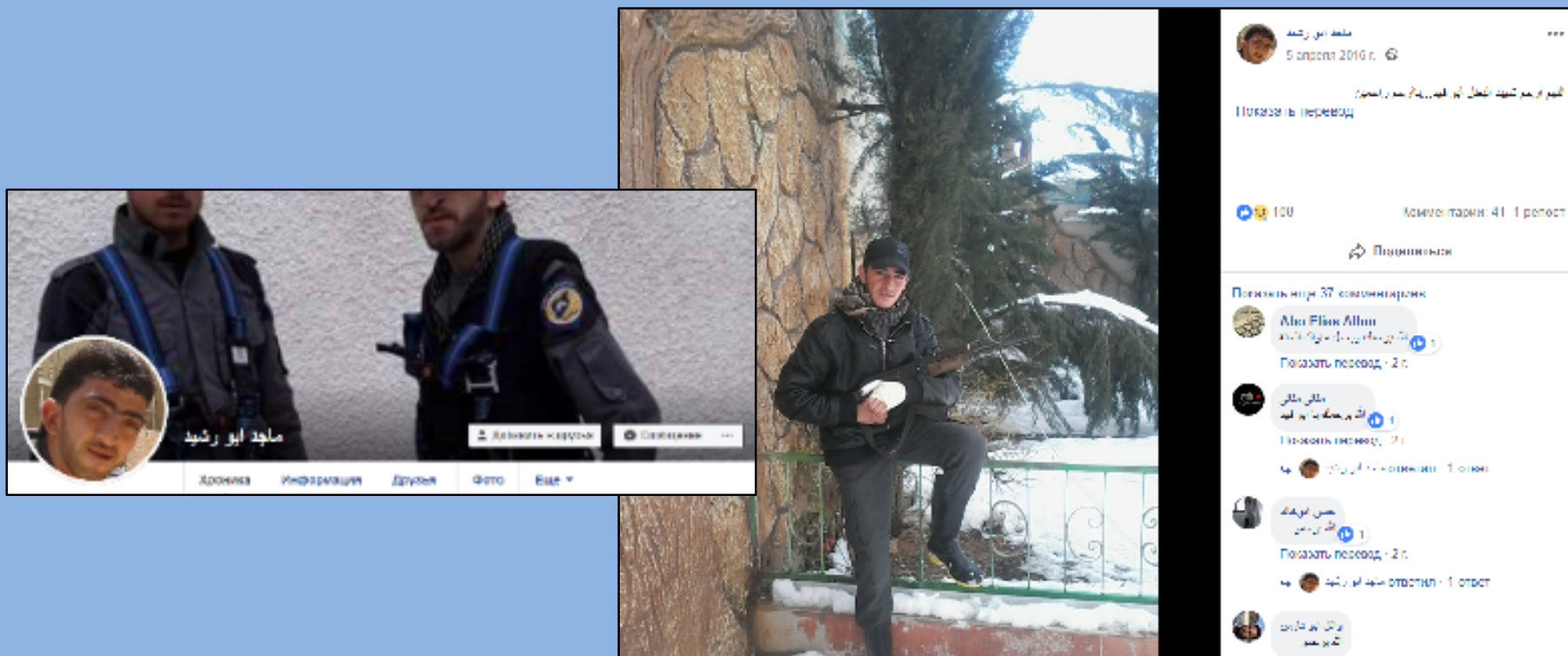
these groups worked in the White Helmets. I know Abu Sayyah, who was one of the leaders in Feilaq al-Rahman in the al-Shaifuniya area, I know Abu Omar al-Rihan from the White Helmets center in the town of al-Rihan. Mohamed Katado was in the town of Harasta. Bashar al-Hafi was a representative of Jabhat al-Nusra. Roughly 100-150 people of the White Helmets workers in Eastern Ghouta were members of different groups. In fact, Jaysh al-Islam, Feilaq al-Rahman, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya were subordinate to this groups, but they were referred to as the White Helmets in public. I know a lot of people who were the White Helmets members and the fighters at the same time.”

There is overwhelming evidence which proves that a significant number of terrorists and members of illegal armed groups headed or worked in the White Helmets centers.

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THE WHITE HELMETS: PART-TIME JOB FOR MEMBERS OF TERRORISTS GROUPS AND MEMBERS OF ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS



Hundreds of the White Helmets members do not conceal the fact that they participated in hostilities and know how to handle a weapon. There are hundreds of their own photos on Facebook where they pose with weapons.

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MEMBERS OF THE WHITE HELMETS: CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER



It is easy to find content in social networks where the White Helmets members do not conceal their sympathy for terrorism. They distribute materials of terrorist group Daesh, of Jabhat al-Nusra, a terrorist Al-Qaeda branch in Syria and Lebanon, and many others. There are a lot of photos of the White Helmets members on Facebook holding weapons in their arms during battles.



Witnesses from the White Helmets tell us that radical anti-Western ideology dominated in the organization.



A significant number of the White Helmets members were fighters of terrorist and illegal armed groups. They had combat experience and knew how to handle a weapon.

In 2018, hundreds of former White Helmets members came to the Western countries. **Considerable number of them pose a clear threat to the**

security of these countries. This threat has even grown since the White Helmets leader Raed Saleh was not allowed in 2016 to enter the USA in the Washington Airport and his visa was cancelled because he was included in the list of suspects for posing a threat to the US security.