

Advocacy dossier

Wael Hamada

وائل حمادة

Forcibly disappeared **Syria**

Wael Hamada is a Syrian human rights activist, a co-founder of the Local Coordination Committees and the Violations Documentation Center, who was abducted in Douma on 9 December 2013 with his wife Razan Zaitouneh, Samira Khalil and Nazem Hammadi. His fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

01

The case at a glance

Wael Hamada is a Syrian human rights activist, a co-founder of the Local Coordination Committees and the Violations Documentation Center, who was abducted in Douma on 9 December 2013 with his wife Razan Zaitouneh, Samira Khalil and Nazem Hammadi. His fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

Status	Arrested	Country
Forcibly disappeared	**9 Dec 2013**	**Syria**

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Immediately disclose the location, legal status, and condition of Wael Hamada.

02 Grant unrestricted access to family and independent legal counsel.

03 Bring Wael Hamada promptly before a competent judicial authority, or release them.

04 Investigate the disappearance as a crime under international law and hold all responsible officials accountable.

02

How the case unfolded

May 2011

Arrest

Detained for three months after Air Force Intelligence raids the family home

In May 2011, after peaceful protests began in Syria, Air Force Intelligence raided the Damascus home of Wael Hamada and his wife, the lawyer Razan Zaitouneh, and detained him together with his brother. He was held for three months and then released.

9 December 2013

Start of enforced disappearance

Abducted from the Violations Documentation Center office in Douma

On the evening of 9 December 2013, masked gunmen stormed the joint office of the Violations Documentation Center and the Local Development and Small Projects Support office in Douma, in Eastern Ghouta, and abducted Razan Zaitouneh, her husband Wael Hamada, Samira Khalil and Nazem Hammadi. The area was then under the control of armed opposition groups. No group has claimed responsibility. Jaysh al-Islam, the dominant group in Douma at the time, has denied involvement.

8 December 2016

Other act

56 organisations call for the release of the four on the third anniversary

On the eve of the third anniversary of the abduction, 56 human rights organisations issued a joint statement calling for Samira Khalil, Razan Zaitouneh, Wael Hamada and Nazem Hammadi to be released immediately. The statement noted that Jaysh al-Islam, part of the Islamic Front, exercised de facto control over Douma at the time of the abduction, and that there had been no news of the four since.

August 2018

Other act

Reporting points to Jaysh al-Islam's Tawbah prison; the four not among detainees released from Douma

Reporting in August 2018, based in part on an Associated Press investigation, described clues including a written threat and witness accounts pointing to the four having been held in Jaysh al-Islam's Tawbah prison. Mazen Darwish, a colleague of Razan Zaitouneh, said the centre had evidence that she was in the group's custody until early 2017. Jaysh al-Islam denied any role. When the group surrendered Douma to government forces in April 2018 it released detainees from Tawbah prison, and the four were not among them.

29 January 2020

Other act

Former Jaysh al-Islam spokesperson Majdi Nema arrested in France

French authorities arrested Majdi Nema, known as Islam Alloush, a former spokesperson of Jaysh al-Islam, in Marseille, following a complaint filed on 26 June 2019 by FIDH, the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression and the Ligue des droits de l'Homme. He was charged in January 2020 with offences including complicity in war crimes, torture and enforced disappearance, with the abduction of the four defenders from Douma among the facts under investigation.

20 November 2023

Other act

Paris investigating chamber finds Jaysh al-Islam responsible for the disappearance

In the French case against Majdi Nema, the investigating chamber of the Paris Court of Appeal found that Jaysh al-Islam must be considered responsible for the disappearance of the four human rights defenders abducted in Douma. It nonetheless dismissed the charge of complicity in enforced disappearance, holding that the legal criterion of state involvement was not met for the group, and kept only the charges of complicity in the war crime of enlisting minors and participation in a group formed to prepare war crimes.

14 February 2024

Other act

French Court of Cassation upholds dismissal of the enforced disappearance charge

The French Court of Cassation upheld the decision not to try Majdi Nema for enforced disappearance, finding that Jaysh al-Islam did not act as, or with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of, a state. This closed that avenue for the abduction of the four defenders in the French proceedings. The remaining charges went to trial.

1 January 2025

Other act

Protesters in Douma call on Syria's new authorities to investigate

After the fall of the Assad government, protesters held a sit-in in Douma demanding justice for Razan Zaitouneh, Samira Khalil, Wael Hamada and Nazem Hammadi, and called on Syria's new rulers to investigate what happened to them. Samira Khalil's husband, the writer Yassin al-Haj Saleh, spoke at the protest. There has been no sign of life or proof of death since the abduction.

28 May 2025

Other act

Paris court convicts former Jaysh al-Islam spokesperson in a case covering the four defenders' abduction

After a trial held from 29 April to 28 May 2025, the Paris Assize Court convicted Majdi Nema of complicity in the war crime of enlisting minors and of participating in a group formed to prepare war crimes, with the kidnapping and confinement of the four human rights defenders taken in Douma in 2013 among the crimes covered, and sentenced him to 10 years in prison. He appealed. The fate and whereabouts of the four remain unknown.

June 2026

Other act

Convicted Jaysh al-Islam spokesperson asks Syrian authorities to seek transfer of his case; the four remain missing

In an audio message attributed to him and released in June 2026, Majdi Nema, held in France since 2020, asked Syria's president and the ministers of defence, foreign affairs and justice to contact the French authorities and have his case transferred to the Syrian judiciary. An Al Jazeera account of the case published on 7 June 2026 recalled that the French courts had found Jaysh al-Islam responsible for the disappearance of the four defenders. No public step by the Syrian authorities to establish their fate had been reported, and their fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

03
The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Wael Hamada has been missing since he was abducted in Douma on 9 December 2013 with his wife Razan Zaitouneh, Samira Khalil and Nazem Hammadi. His fate and whereabouts remain unknown; a French court found in 2023 that Jaysh al-Islam must be considered responsible for the disappearance, and the conviction of its former spokesperson in a related case is under appeal.

Background and Work

Wael Hamada is a Syrian human rights defender and activist. He was already an activist before the 2011 uprising and was arrested by the authorities for that work. He is married to the human rights lawyer Razan Zaitouneh. When peaceful protests began in 2011 he became an active member and co-founder of the Local Coordination Committees, the network that organised protests and documented repression, and of the Violations Documentation Center in Syria, which recorded killings, detentions and disappearances by all parties to the conflict.

In May 2011 Air Force Intelligence raided the couple's home in Damascus and detained Wael Hamada together with his brother. He was held for three months and then released. By 2013 he was working in Douma, in Eastern Ghouta, then held by armed opposition groups and besieged by government forces. Before his abduction he was working to bring humanitarian assistance to the residents of besieged Eastern Ghouta.

The Abduction

On the evening of 9 December 2013, masked gunmen stormed the joint office of the Violations Documentation Center and the Local Development and Small Projects Support office in Douma and abducted Wael Hamada, Razan Zaitouneh, the political activist and former political prisoner Samira Khalil, and the lawyer and poet Nazem Hammadi. The four became known as the Douma Four.

No group has claimed responsibility. Jaysh al-Islam, which exercised de facto control over Douma at the time, has denied involvement.

The Case

In August 2018 reporting based in part on an Associated Press investigation described clues, including a written threat and witness accounts, indicating that the four had been held in Jaysh al-Islam's Tawbah prison. Mazen Darwish, a colleague of Razan Zaitouneh, said the Violations Documentation Center had evidence that she was in the group's custody until early 2017. When Jaysh al-Islam surrendered Douma to government forces in April 2018 it released detainees from Tawbah prison; the four were not among them.

After the fall of the Assad government in December 2024, protesters held a sit-in in Douma on 1 January 2025 and called on Syria's new authorities to investigate what happened to the four; Samira Khalil's husband, the writer Yassin al-Haj Saleh, spoke there. No public step by the Syrian authorities to establish their fate has been reported. There has been no sign of life and no proof of death since the abduction.

Legal Proceedings

On 26 June 2019, FIDH, the Syrian Center for Media

and Freedom of Expression and the Ligue des droits de l'Homme filed a complaint in France against Jaysh al-Islam. On 29 January 2020 French authorities arrested the group's former spokesperson, Majdi Nema, known as Islam Alloush, in Marseille. He was charged with offences including complicity in war crimes, torture and enforced disappearance, with the abduction of the four among the facts under investigation.

On 20 November 2023 the investigating chamber of the Paris Court of Appeal found that Jaysh al-Islam must be considered responsible for the disappearance of the four, but dismissed the enforced disappearance charge on the ground that the group did not meet the legal criterion of state involvement. The Court of Cassation upheld that ruling on 14 February 2024.

After a trial held from 29 April to 28 May 2025, the Paris Assize Court convicted Majdi Nema of complicity in the war crime of enlisting minors and of participating in a group formed to prepare war crimes, and sentenced him to 10 years in prison. According to FIDH, the kidnapping and confinement of the four were among the crimes covered by the second count. He appealed. In June 2026 an audio message attributed to him asked the Syrian authorities to seek the transfer of his case to the Syrian judiciary. No date for the appeal trial has been confirmed by a court or by the organisations that are civil parties.

International Response

Human rights organisations have called for the release of the four on each anniversary. On 8 December 2016, 56 organisations called for their immediate release, and on 11 December 2018 a group of organisations, including the International Service for Human Rights, called for an investigation into what happened to them. Amnesty International featured the four in its campaign on the tens of thousands of people disappeared in Syria, and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights lists Wael Hamada as missing.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/wael-hamada/

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