

Tunisia arrests Al-Qaeda branch leader

Author:

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TUNIS: Tunisia has arrested a suspected branch leader of Al-Qaeda in North Africa, along with several others suspected of planning "terrorist" attacks, a judicial spokesman said on Friday.

"Two dangerous wanted individuals, one of whom is an Al-Qaeda leader," were arrested in Tunis, Mohsen Dali said.

Authorities also arrested three others accused of providing material and logistical support for organizing "terrorist" acts, Dali added, without providing details of what type of operations were planned.

All five suspects were Tunisian, he said.

The Interior Ministry had said in a statement that the arrested branch leader had already carried out "missions" abroad in an area where jihadist groups operate, without specifying which country.

The Tunisian offshoot of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, is known as Okba Ibn Nafaa.

Initial investigations indicate the suspect had been consulting other leaders of the group to plan "terrorist operations in Tunisia," according to the ministry.

Authorities seized a weapon and ammunition during the suspect's arrest, it added.

The announcement of the arrests comes days after the sacking of Interior Minister Taoufik Charfeddine over high-level staffing changes he sought to make to some security agencies, according to a recent statement from Tunisia's prime minister.

Tunisia faced a rise in jihadist activity after its 2011 revolution, with attacks killing dozens of security personnel, civilians and foreign tourists. The presidency last month announced a six-month extension of Tunisia's state of emergency, in place since a 2015 attack on a presidential guard bus claimed by the Daesh group.



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Author:

Sat, 2021-01-09 01:08

BAGHDAD: Languishing in a tent in northern Iraq, Nour yearns to return home but can't because she is accused of supporting jihadists – an allegation she insists has been designed to obscure a land dispute.

The 22-year-old's family is one of hundreds rights groups fear will remain stuck indefinitely in limbo due to long-standing wrangles being repackaged by neighbors or authorities into accusations they belong to the Daesh group. Exacerbating their situation, authorities have since autumn sped up long-stated plans to close displacement camps across Iraq where 200,000 people still live.

Nour's brother left their hometown near the northern city of Mosul and joined the jihadists in 2014, the year Daesh seized a third of Iraqi territory in a

lightening offensive.

But even before her brother's departure stoked unwelcome attention, the family had already been locked for years in a dispute with an influential local sheikh. "He resented us because we owned land that he claimed belonged to him," said Nour.

"The sheikh tried to discredit our family," she alleged, nervously stirring sugar into her tea before downing it in one gulp.

"Every time there was a problem in town, it was my father's or my brother's fault," she added.

Rights groups and others – including the International Organization for Migration – are worried about displaced families who stand accused of links to Daesh, sometimes falsely, and may face violent retribution if sent home. "We know there are at least hundreds of families and women in particular who cannot return to their areas of origin because of these accusations," said Belkis Wille of Human Rights Watch.

"Most of the time, the accusations are based on rumors, difficult to verify and often linked to tribal problems or problems between families," she said.



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A Lebanese nonprofit strives to give women a stronger voice

Fri, 2021-01-08 22:44

BEIRUT: Lebanese women have long fought against gender discrimination in the system. While activists have made great strides this year in terms of political and social awareness, national legal protections from domestic violence and sexual assault remain inadequate. The country also has a weak framework for basic women's rights, especially in matters such as divorce, property rights and responsibility for children after divorce.

Rawan Yaghi, a former teacher based in Lebanon's northeastern region of Baalbek, set up social enterprise USPEaK in 2009 with the aim of giving the country's citizens a voice, particularly its women. The organization's main objective is to create a democratic community that engages citizens through education.



USPEaK founder Rawan Yaghi. (Supplied photo)

"In my earlier career as a teacher, I was very active in social activism," said Yaghi. "I was invited to International Women's Day in Washington. I saw women being celebrated and honored for the enterprises they had started and thought, 'oh, I can do that.'"

Yaghi registered USPEaK as an NGO in 2015. Since then, 2,600 women have been taught English and 1,200 have been taught about entrepreneurship. She has

also overseen the education of about 10,000 Lebanese 7th and 8th grade students, who are taught a set curriculum based on themes such as citizenship and democracy.

INNUMBERS

2,600 Lebanese women taught English by USPEaK.

1,200 Lebanese women taught about entrepreneurship.

2015 Year when USPEaK was registered as an NGO.

One of the main areas that USPEaK focuses on is teaching English. Yaghi believes the English language is one of the most important tools Lebanese women can have when seeking employment.

“It’s like a passport. When they learn English, they’re able to access information that they are not usually exposed to,” she said. “They can know more about the media and the social work of others and they can get inspired by different ideas.”

Yaghi used her savings and a bank loan to launch USPEaK. Around a decade later, her civil rights work is gaining recognition on a global scale, receiving funds and grants from Germany, the UK and the US among others.

“Many of our funds come from the US Embassy, especially for education – teaching English and (hosting) spelling bee projects,” said Yaghi. “We have other donors through UK Aid and ActionAid where we’re working on social cohesion.”



Some 2,600 women have been taught English and 1,200 have been taught about entrepreneurship via USPeaK since 2015. (Supplied)

Besides promoting democratic engagement, USPEaK is also focused on helping women reach positions of power in government. The enterprise has worked with 57 potential female candidates with the ambition that women will eventually make up a sizable proportion of elected representatives.

“We have supported independents in running for office,” said Yaghi. “I was training potential women candidates in many different places in Lebanon. We support all of our social work through low-cost English courses. We work on many different things related to women candidates – this is where you can speak up, raise your voice, and express yourself.”

USPEaK currently employs 10 full-time staff alongside four part-timers and 80 contractors. The mission is not only to increase general political awareness, but also to shed light on more serious subjects, such as preventing violent extremism, the role of women in raising their children to be non-violent citizens, anti-sectarianism, and preventing child abuse.



Nada Toufayli runs Debating and Community Service training for Teaching Women English Program teachers. (Supplied)

Reshaping the political landscape is a tall order for Yaghi and her team, but she believes a positive mindset is crucial for any social enterprise that wishes to achieve its goals.

“If you feel like you are a successful person, you will be a successful person,” she said. “If you have an inspiring idea, believe that it will be good; it will get money and be funded.

“Get the ideas, get the business plan, believe in yourself and go for it.”

• This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.





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Tech entrepreneurs set to lead latest edition of Saudi Arabia's 'Misk Talk' Mohammed Almousa, Saudi pharmacist, entrepreneur, and TV host

[Turkey criticized for indictment of 108 people over 2014 protests](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-01-08 23:16

ANKARA: The controversial indictment of 108 people, including Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdog, former co-chairs of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), over their involvement in the 2014 street protests was approved on Tuesday by Ankara Heavy Penal Court.

Demirtas and Yuksekdog, who face trial on several other charges, have been behind bars for over four years.

The 3,530-page-long indictment accused the defendants of homicide and of undermining state authority and territorial integrity, seeking life sentences for 38 of them.

The first trial will be held on April 25.

In October 2014, large crowds flooded the streets in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast region to protest against Ankara's inaction in defending Syrians during Daesh's siege of Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani, just across the border.

When the demonstrations became violent, 37 people were killed, and Ankara blamed the HDP for triggering the violence.

This latest indictment is seen as a new attempt by the government to restrain the HDP and further corner it over its links with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

However, the imprisonment of Demirtas has been harshly criticized by European institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) which on Dec. 22 called for Demirtas' release.

"This is the 3,530-page indictment announced after six years and after the ECHR decision! It is based on newspaper articles, comments and predictions of anonymous witnesses, as well as tweets from a fake account that was opened in the name of Demirtas. Lots of copy and paste. Honestly, I expected a more successful 'Counter Move' setup!" tweeted Demirtas' lawyer, Mahsuni Karaman.

The ECHR considers his detention had “the ulterior purpose of stifling pluralism and limiting freedom of political debate” without any substantial evidence about the terrorism charges that he is accused of. According to the European court, his continued detention is a serious “violation of his rights.”

However, ECHR decisions, despite being binding, are often flouted in Turkey, with the rulers in Ankara accusing the top European court of being one-sided and having a double standard.

Erdogan recently called Demirtas a “terrorist with the blood of dozens of people on his hands.”

“The indictment is another attempt to flout the ECHR judgment ordering Demirtas’ release,” Emma Sinclair-Webb, director of Human Rights Watch Turkey, told Arab News. “However, Demirtas is already on trial on the basis of the same evidence so it doesn’t work to simply change the charge and try him a second time on the same bogus evidence in an effort to keep him locked up.”

Since the March 2019 local elections, dozens of HDP municipality mayors have been replaced by government-appointed trustees over the protests.

Last October, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its nationalistic ally MHP yet again rejected the HDP’s demand for a proper investigation of the 2014 protests.

According to Sinclair-Webb, the European court’s judgment made that very point and ordered the immediate release of Demirtas.

“Turkey must implement that European court judgment immediately,” she said.

While the government bloc accuses HDP of inflaming violence, the Kurdish party claims that it was doing its best to prevent bloodshed at that time.



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[Egypt-based equestrians make it a mission to stamp out animal cruelty](#)

Fri, 2021-01-08 23:55

CAIRO: When Jill Barton and her husband first came to Cairo seven years ago to volunteer at a horse and donkey sanctuary, they had little inkling they would end up moving to Egypt permanently to care for rescued animals.

Originally from Australia, Barton and her husband Warren share a great love of horses. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that during a visit to Egypt in December 2013, the couple were moved by the suffering of the local horses and donkeys put to work in deprived rural areas.

The owners of these animals often cannot afford veterinary care, nor do they have the luxury of giving the animals time off to recover.

There are an estimated three million working horses and donkeys in Egypt used for transport, agriculture and tourism. According to Barton, many of them are the descendants of Australian "war horses" left behind after the First World

War.

In mid-2014, Barton and her husband sold up their family home in Australia and almost all of their possessions before moving to Abu Sir on the outskirts of Cairo. They rented a property with nearby stables in close proximity to the region's famous archaeological sites, where horseback riding is popular.



Abused horses and donkeys in Egypt find a champion in Egypt Equine Aid.
(Supplied)

There, the couple established Egypt Equine Aid (EEA), a non-profit organization that rescues horses, donkeys and mules from maltreatment and gives them a better life. Horses and donkeys are particularly vulnerable to abuse, often overworked and with few facilities to guard their welfare.

"Treating sick animals at the local farms has a strong impact on the family businesses and animal welfare," said Muriel Sacks, EEA's veterinary technical director, who is originally from Switzerland.

EEA provides medical treatment to sick and injured animals on a non-profit basis. Arrangements are available for finding a new home (rehoming) for animals whose owners can no longer look after them. EEA also provides training for veterinarians and schemes for local workers in farriery (equine hoof care), medical care and equestrian skills.

"Local owners of donkeys and horses are shown how to treat, feed and work

their (helpers) in the most sustainable way to keep them strong and healthy,” Sacks said.

The organization currently employs four veterinarians, four assistants and eight support staff, including grooms and administrators. It also has its own farrier team, trained by EEA, to work in the community.

FASTFACT

Egypt Equine Aid (EEA) rescues horses, donkeys and mules from maltreatment and gives them a better life.

“By offering jobs and education, we provide young men and women of the local community with an opportunity to have a reliable salary and strengthen the workforce,” Sacks said.

While initially self-funded, EEA has since received grants from the Australian Embassy in Cairo and is recognized among an international community of supporters and horse-lovers who send donations.

“We rely on our social media pages and other media to spread the word about our work,” Sacks said.

Now Barton and her team are looking to expand the reach of their project. Their future plans include increasing the capacity of the existing hospital to treat more animals.

In the mid- to long-term, they look forward to building a whole new hospital and fitting it with advanced technologies for specialist diagnostics, prolonged general anesthetics (medications that cause anesthesia) and more complex surgical procedures.

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