

Syria Kurds seek help in rehabilitating Daesh-linked minors

Author:

AFP

ID:

1625231121032644400

Fri, 2021-07-02 11:57

BEIRUT: Syria's Kurds Friday urged international help to set up rehabilitation centers for minors linked to the Daesh group, after charges they were holding "hundreds of children" in adult prisons.

Acknowledging that some extremist-linked minors were being held in adult prisons, separate to the many more in camps, senior Kurdish foreign affairs official Abdelkarim Omar told AFP around 30 teenagers have lately been transferred out of one overcrowded camp.

He spoke just days after the International Committee of the Red Cross said "hundreds of children – mostly boys, some as young as 12 – are detained in adult prisons" in northeast Syria.

Kurdish authorities hold thousands of suspected extremist fighters in their jails, as well as tens of thousands of their relatives in camps for the displaced, after spearheading a US-backed battle against Daesh that formally ended in victory in early 2019.

Omar told AFP an unspecified number of Daesh-linked minors who are held in jails are kept in separate quarters to the adults.

He said the region desperately needed more rehabilitation centers for teenagers, on top of a single one already housing some 120 near the city of Qamishli.

"We think children do not belong in either camps or prisons," he told AFP.

As a start, he said, "between 30 to 35 children aged 12 and older have been taken out of Al-Hol camp."

The Kurds were preparing a new rehabilitation center in the city of Hasakah, which "will be ready in the coming days," Omar added.

Since Kurdish-led fighters expelled Daesh from the last scrap of their territorial "caliphate" in March 2019, Al-Hol has swelled to a tent city of some 62,000 people – civilians but also alleged Daesh relatives.

The United Nations says it has documented "radicalization" in the camp, where the number of guards is limited and around 10,000 foreign Daesh-linked women and children lived in a separate annex.

Fabrizio Carboni, head of ICRC's Middle East and Near East operations, on

Wednesday described a “pervasive sense of hopelessness” in Al-Hol.

Boys lived “in a state of constant fear,” as “once they reach a certain age, many are separated from their families and transferred to adult places of detention,” he said in a statement.

He called for children in detention to be “either reunited with their families in camps, repatriated alongside them or have alternative care arrangements made for them.”

Omar, the Kurdish official, urged the international community to help it “set up 15 or 16 centers to bring the children out of the jails, until a solution is found.”

Keeping them in their current “environment will only lead to the emergence of a new generation of terrorists,” he warned.



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Syria’s Kurds call for international court to try Daesh militants
Syria’s Kurds set free nearly 300 Daesh-linked Syrians

Beirut blast judge to question top politicians, security officials

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1625228330922419300

Fri, 2021-07-02 15:25

BEIRUT: The judge in charge of the investigation into the Beirut port blast will seek to question top politicians and security officials, Lebanon's national news agency said on Friday, almost a year after the explosion that devastated the capital.

The blast in August, blamed on a huge quantity of chemicals left for years in poor storage conditions, deepened a political and economic crisis in the heavily indebted country.

Ordinary Lebanese have grown increasingly angry that no senior officials have been held to account for the explosion that killed hundreds of people, injured thousands and ruined whole neighbourhoods in the centre of Beirut. Judge Tarek Bitar, who became the lead investigator into the blast after his predecessor was removed in February, will call in caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab and others, the agency said, although it said no dates had yet been set.

He has also written to parliament asking to lift immunity from former Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil, former Public Works Minister Ghazi Zeaiter and former Interior Minister Nohad Machnoug as a first step towards charging them.

Zeaiter, a parliamentary deputy from speaker Nabih Berri's bloc, and Khalil issued a statement later on Friday saying they would cooperate with the investigator to help determine those responsible for the blast, even before permission was issued. Machnoug declined to comment when contacted by Reuters. The caretaker prime minister and others listed as targets for questioning by the judge could not immediately be reached for comment.

Diab and the same ex-officials were charged last year by judge Fadi Sawan, who previously led the probe, but they refused to be questioned as suspects, accusing him of overstepping his powers.

Judge Bitar also asked for permission from caretaker Interior Minister Mohamed Fahmy to question Lebanon's security chief Abbas Ibrahim, the agency said.

Fahmy told Reuters he had not been notified yet about the process but would take all legal steps required once he was.

Bitar's list included another former public works minister, Youssef Finianos, and Tony Saliba, the head of state security.

Sawan was removed from the investigation in February by the court of cassation after a request by Khalil and Zeaiter, a major setback for the families of victims seeking justice.

Sawan accused the three ex-ministers and caretaker prime minister of

negligence. The court of cassation cited “legitimate suspicion” over Sawan’s neutrality, partly because his house was damaged in the blast.



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Judiciary to simulate welding operation that preceded Beirut blast
Lebanon request satellite images for site of Beirut blast

[Tunis goes under partial lockdown over record virus cases](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1625166588605153100

Thu, 2021-07-01 22:24

TUNIS: Tunisia placed the capital Tunis and the northern town of Bizerte

under a partial lockdown from Thursday in a bid to rein in record daily coronavirus cases and deaths.

Parties, sporting and cultural events and public prayers are banned until July 14 under the measures which cover Tunis and its surroundings, adding to similar measures in place for the coastal cities of Sousse and Monastir. The measures announced late Wednesday also include an overnight curfew from 8:00 p.m. (1900 GMT) until 5:00 am (0400 GMT) and a ban on cafes and restaurants serving food except outdoors or by delivery.

Many Tunisian hospitals are at full capacity, and medics say they are unable to cope.

Four inland regions of the North African country have also been under total lockdown since June 20 as cases have spiralled, as well as the northern town of Bizerte.

Adding to the sense of crisis, the army has been deployed in some areas to enforce lockdown measures.

The health ministry announced a record 5,921 cases and 116 deaths from Covid-19 on Tuesday, the latest figures available in the country of 12 million.

Tunisia has struggled with a lack of vaccines and has so far administered initial jabs to around 15 percent of its population, with just over half a million receiving the full two doses.



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Tunisian doctors battle coronavirus spike
Tunisian PM Hichem Mechichi contracts COVID-19

[A Gaza library gives Palestinian children a chance to escape into literature](#)

Author:

Rawaa Talass

ID:

1625165405225025400

Thu, 2021-07-01 21:49

DUBAI: Picking through the debris of what had been his university's English department, before it was pulverized by an Israeli airstrike, Mosab Abu Toha brushed away a fine film of dust coating a book he found among the rubble.

The battered volume was an anthology of classic American literature, featuring the work of great writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Walt Whitman.

The poignancy of this discovery, among the ruins of the Islamic University of Gaza in the summer of 2014, when Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas last fought a major war, has stuck with Abu Toha ever since.



Abu Toha wants Palestinian children to discover the vast world of literature, and grow beyond the mental and physical confines of Gaza. (Supplied)

The emotions came flooding back during the 11 tumultuous days in May this year when hostilities between the old belligerents flared up anew.

A 28-year-old poet and teacher of the English language, who has lived through four significant wars in Gaza since 2008, Abu Toha saw an urgent need to protect public access to learning resources and classic works of literature amid the stifling blockade of the territory and the routine bombardments it endures.

It was in the aftermath of the 51-day war in 2014 – “the hardest of them all,” as he recalls – that Abu Toha began to receive donations, organized through social media, that laid the foundations for what would become the Edward Said Public Library.



Abu Toha: These kids are learning new things and they are going to be better than me. (Supplied)

Named in honor of the late Palestinian scholar and theoretician, Gaza's first and only English-language library opened its doors in 2017 with the help of international fundraisers. Now its two branches, in Beit Lahiya and Gaza City, house more than 2,000 volumes, most of them classic works of literature.

The venues have become a refuge amid the chaos, places where young Palestinians can freely access the timeless works of authors such as William Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, Dr. Seuss, John Le Carre, Herman Melville, Mahmoud Darwish and, of course, Edward Said.

Abu Toha likens the library to a candle in the dark, offering an escape from the harsh realities of life in Gaza.



Mosab Abu Toha hopes young Palestinians will channel their daily traumas into rewarding creative pursuits. (Supplied)

“Many children seem happy in the street,” he told Arab News. “They will smile at you – but deep inside they are traumatized. If you sit with them and ask

them some questions, and you dig deep inside their subconscious, you would know that these children have nightmares at night.

“These children need to have some space to understand that what they are living through is not normal. What they are living in is abnormal.”

Abu Toha’s passion for reading and the English language stems from a childhood during which he was surrounded by books. After obtaining a bachelor’s degree in language tuition, he taught English classes at UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools.



The library is a place where young Palestinians can freely access works by William Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, and John Le Carre. (Supplied)

A major turning point came when he was invited to travel to the US in 2019 as a visiting poet at Harvard University as part of the international Scholars at Risk program. It was the first time he had ever left the Gaza Strip.

“I think my experiences – especially as a kid who never traveled outside of Gaza until he was 27, someone who doesn’t have an airport in his country, someone who doesn’t have a seaport, someone who has never stopped hearing the noise of the drones in the sky and the shelling of tanks – pushed me to discover my own talent in writing creatively,” Abu Toha said of his literary inspirations.



Edward Said was not only a Palestinian but a global citizen, and naming the library after him is an honor for us, says Abu Toha. (Supplied)

He hopes other young Palestinians will likewise channel their daily traumas into rewarding creative pursuits.

“I think it’s very important for young writers to talk about their experiences in different genres, in both Arabic and English,” he said. “It’s a duty. You need to tell the world what you are seeing.”

Most of the visitors to the library are children and young adults, he explained, who rarely have access to books at home.

“It’s not easy to find home libraries in Gaza,” said Abu Toha. “It’s very rare maybe because of the financial circumstances; people can barely put food on their table.

“But some children, when they come to the library they see these books, beautiful tables and chairs, and they want to make use of it.”

The library has become his life’s work. But stocking its shelves has proved to be an endless struggle as a result of the strict blockade, with every shipment of new books detained and thoroughly searched by Israeli customs officials.



"It's not easy to find home libraries in Gaza," says Abu Toha. (Supplied)

Nevertheless, thanks to generous donations by overseas supporters, including many authors who provide signed editions of their works, the Edward Said Public Library is richly stocked.

Even Noam Chomsky, the famed American linguist, philosopher and public intellectual, has contributed to its collection, describing the library as "a rare flicker of light and hope for the young people of Gaza."

The family of Edward Said, who died in 2003 at the age of 67, has also offered its support, sending copies of the scholar's influential works. Abu Toha never met Said, but feels his is a fitting name for the library.

"He's a symbol for Palestine, a symbol for freedom," said Abu Toha. "He's a public intellectual, not siding with this or that. He said what he thought loudly without fearing the Palestinian Authority or Israel or the American administration.

"I think he's a prominent example for everyone who seeks justice in this world. I think Edward Said was not only a Palestinian but a global citizen, and naming the library after him is an honor for us."



Famed American philosopher Noam Chomsky has contributed to the library's collection. (Supplied)

Both branches of the library were fortunate to survive the fighting in May this year with minimal damage.

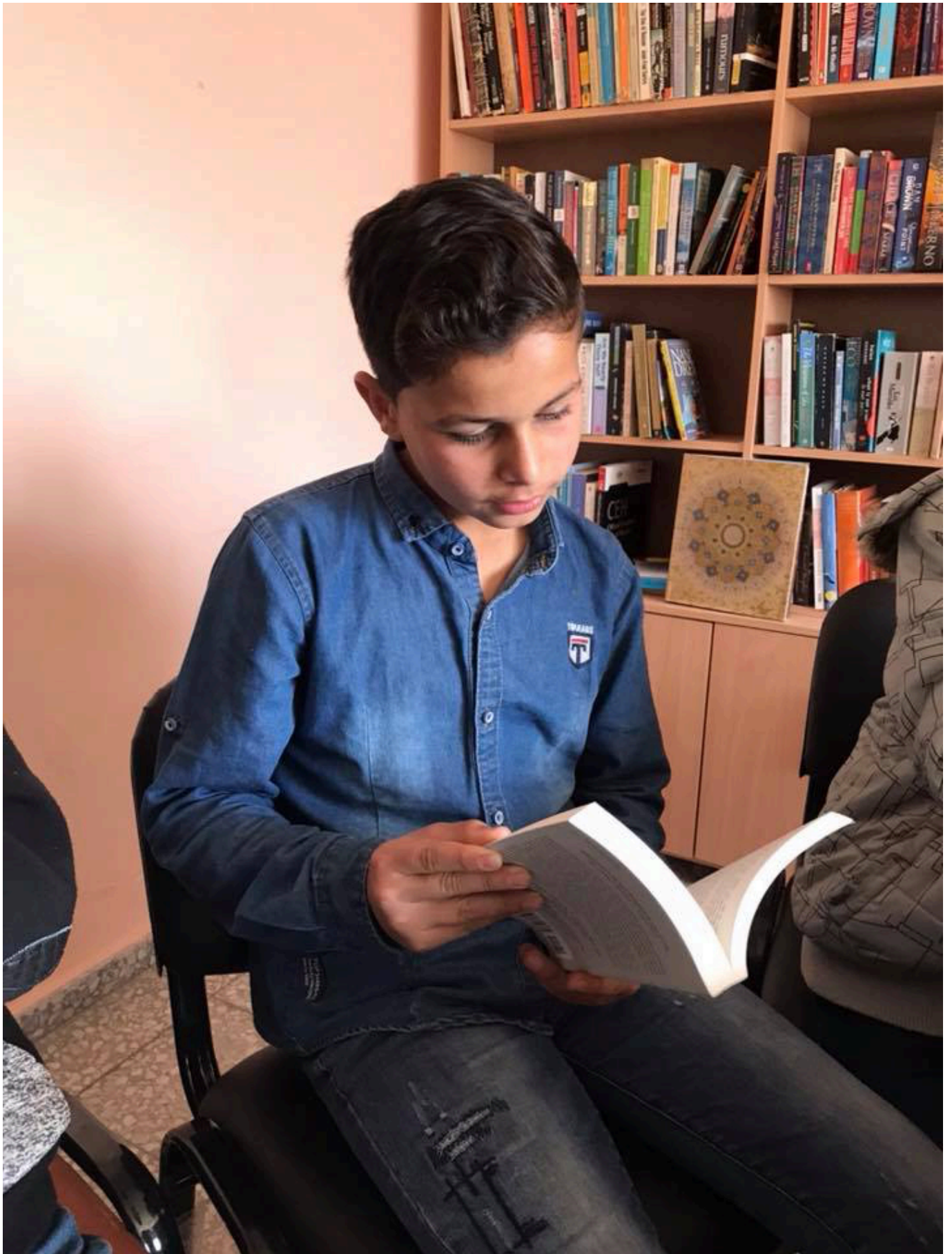
“Although it was short, the scale of terrorism, destruction and eviction of families was astonishing. It was very tough,” Abu Toha said. “There was the use of new weaponry and it was really frightening. Even now, when I remember what happened, I can’t believe we’re still alive.”



Mosab Abu Toha looks at a book he found among the rubble following an Israeli airstrike. (Supplied)

To help the community get back on its feet, support the library and fund psychological support programs for families affected by the latest war, he has launched a fundraising campaign that so far has raised about half of its \$20,000 goal.

He also wants to open several additional branches of the library so that many more Palestinian children can discover and explore the vast world of literature, put their plight into perspective and, ultimately, grow beyond the mental and physical confines of Gaza.



These children have nightmares at night, says Mosab Abu Toha. (Supplied)

“The only hope that I feel is when I see children coming to the library, reading books, taking part in activities, going back to their homes, telling their parents about what they did in the library, and coming the next day

with friends to the library,” Abu Toha said.

“This is the only thing that brings hope to my heart: that these kids are learning new things and they are going to be better than me.”

Twitter: [@artprojectdx](https://twitter.com/artprojectdx)





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Gaza children fly kites with portraits of kids killed in last conflict with Israel 'She screams when someone comes near': Gaza children in trauma

[Jordan's military prosecutor seeks highest punishment for sedition accused](#)

Thu, 2021-07-01 20:12

AMMAN: Jordan's military State Security Court (SSC) prosecutor on Thursday asked the court to inflict the highest punishment on Bassem Awadallah and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid over their alleged involvement in a high-profile

sedition case.

Awadallah, a former chief of the Jordanian Royal Court, and bin Zaid, a distant royal family member, are standing trial at the SSC on charges of plotting to undermine the regime and the country's security and stability.

The two men were arrested on April 3 along with 15 other people suspected of involvement in the case, which also involved Prince Hamzah, a half-brother of Jordan's King Abdullah.

Jordanian authorities said that Awadallah, bin Zaid and Prince Hamzah were attempting to destabilize Jordan in collaboration with "foreign entities."

Prince Hamzah's case has been settled within the Hashemite family on directives from King Abdullah.

The Jordanian Royal Court published a letter signed by Prince Hamzah in which he vowed allegiance to the monarch and confirmed that he would act "always for His Majesty and his crown prince to help and support."

The charge sheet against Awadallah and bin Zaid said the two defendants were long-time friends because of the nature of their work and connection to Prince Hamzah.

Prince Hamzah was seeking to become the ruler of Jordan and "took advantage of certain incidents, including the COVID-19 pandemic, to create chaos and frustration in the country," the charge sheet added

Their strategy included attacks and criticisms of King Abdullah "with the hope of gaining popular support."

Awadallah and bin Zaid pleaded not guilty during their opening trial earlier this month. Both suspects presented written statements to the SSC on Sunday.

The SSC prosecution sheet also included a charge against bin Zaid of possessing illegal narcotics (hashish).

During Thursday's fifth closed-door session, the defense team asked the SSC for time to prepare their closing arguments, according to the state-run news agency Petra.

The SSC, which looks into cases related to terrorism and state security, set next Tuesday as the date for the trial.

Awadallah's lawyer, Mohammad Afif, was quoted by government-owned Al-Mamlakah TV on Wednesday as saying that the defense team has requested that princes Hamzah, Hashemite and Ali be summoned as witnesses along with Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi.

Afif, a former SSC president, did not elaborate, but sources familiar with the case told Arab News that the SSC turned down the request.

According to lawyers, the two defendants could receive prison terms of three to 20 years if convicted on charges of incitement and sedition.



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Defense in trial on Jordan's destabilization plot will ask court to bring Prince Hamza to testify Prince Hamzah 'in my care' at his palace: Jordan King Abdullah II