

## Daraa: Leasing Confiscated Real Estate

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In an unprecedented move, the government has started renting out confiscated properties to their original owners in Daraa, in cases of executive seizure, if the original owners are still occupying them.

Rent is collected formally, on a month-by-month basis. The amount owed is determined based on the nature and location of the property, with non-irrigated agricultural land yielding the lowest cost, and is most often leased on a yearly basis and priced according to the total land area. Higher on the list is retail space, followed by residential houses.

Mohammad, a resident of rural northern Daraa governorate, said he was officially informed earlier this year that an executive seizure had been placed on his movable and immovable assets, as well as assets belonging to his first-degree relatives, by order of the Terrorism Court. The seizure extended across retail space, homes and agricultural land owned by Mohammad and his relatives, some of which had been planted with trees, and others cultivated seasonally.

A few months after he was informed of the property seizure, Mohammad was forced to pay rent so that he and his family members could continue occupying their properties, he told a correspondent for *The Syria Report* in Daraa. He paid the monthly sums to the Financial Directorate of the Daraa Governorate, which then issued a receipt containing a date and number. That is, the rent is an official payment. The state considers these properties as its own, and claims the right to lease them. Resulting revenues are considered state treasury funds.

In Mohammad's case, he and his family members must now pay a monthly sum of SYP 7,000 for each residential home and SYP 16,000 for each retail space or shop. The annual rent per hectare of seasonal agricultural land ranges from SYP 10,000 to 15,000.

Failure to pay automatically leads to the confiscated property being placed for sale or leased to others via a public auction. Authorities then remove the original owners from the property. Fear of removal has forced Mohammad and his family to pay rent on their properties, especially as there is no judicial authority that would intervene to protect them.

Confiscation of Mohammad's and his family's properties comes after the Terrorism Court charged him with "funding terrorism", "harbouring armed groups" and "working with Arab and foreign bodies," general charges that the court places on most people who are put on trial. Resulting property confiscations have impacted thousands of Syrians.

Regime forces had arrested numerous residents of Daraa governorate after recapturing it in 2018, subsequently issuing decrees to seize their properties. Among them was Radwan Rizq Sarour, who was from the city of Sheikh Miskeen, and died under torture. His body was returned to his family in April 2020. Afterwards, authorities seized his properties, which were estimated to include more than 13 hectares of agricultural land and a residential home.

# The Syria Report

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