

Aleppo: Who Is Residing in Displaced Peoples' Properties in Hayyan?

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More than a year after regime forces recaptured the town of Hayyan in the northern countryside of Aleppo governorate, the Syrian government claims it has finished rehabilitating local services and that life in the town has returned to normal.

These claims were repeated across pro-regime media and the Aleppo Provincial Council. However, facts on the ground differ greatly from pro-regime news reports. According to a correspondent for *The Syria Report* in the area, the vast majority of Hayyan's residents were forcibly displaced in February 2020. The town is now partially inhabited by families of pro-regime militia fighters and others close to them, who have taken over the homes and farmland of displaced residents.

About 25,000 people lived in Hayyan before 2011, according to local estimates. Most of them were displaced to camps in northern opposition-held areas of Idlib and Aleppo governorates.

During last regime attack on Hayyan in February 2020, the Nubl and Al-Zahraa militias, the Aleppo Defence Brigade, Hezbollah, which are loyal to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, as well as the pro-Russia Liwa Al-Quds militia, looted the homes of displaced residents, exhumed graves and burned 40 homes, most of which belonged to members of the pro-opposition Ousu family. Some of these attacks are connected to local disputes. A number of Liwa Al-Quds fighters who participated in the attacks are from the Kasehou family from Hayyan itself, who are loyal to the regime and were hostile to some of their townspeople. This can be explained by understanding the active role played by some of Hayyan's original residents in the uprising against the regime, where many of them joined opposition factions especially the Badr Martyrs Brigade, which had a vital presence in Aleppo city in 2015.

In March 2020, the Syrian government appointed Hamed Al-Bajj as mayor of Hayyan. Al-Bajj is also from a pro-regime family; members of the family fled Hayyan when the town was under opposition control, taking up residence in the nearby towns of Nubl and Al-Zahraa. Many of them also joined the Nubl and Zahraa militias, whose fighters are mostly Shia Muslims.

With support from pro-regime militias, the Kasehou and Al-Bajj families currently occupy displaced residents' properties either because they are of a higher standard or because their own homes were destroyed. The Nubl and Al-Zahraa militias hold the largest share of agricultural land. Before 2020, Hayyan was known for growing wheat, lentils, cumin and fruit trees. However, since then Hezbollah has moved in and planted cannabis on fields extending from Hayyan southward to the city of Hareitan, according to a correspondent for *The Syria Report*. Hezbollah has brought in farm workers to cultivate the crop in exchange for daily wages and housing in displaced residents' homes.

According to a former official in pro-opposition Hayyan's local council, around 40 families currently live in the town. Most of them are from the Al-Bajj and Kasehou families, though there are also some families of fighters from the Nubl, Al-Zahraa and Aleppo Defence Brigades who are not originally from Hayyan. The former official added that there were also Hezbollah fighters in the town who had taken over some farmland and homes on the outskirts, as well as several industrial facilities between Hayyan and Al-Zahraa near the Aleppo-Gaziantep highway.

A view of Hayyan.

The Syria Report



Source: Activists

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