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SYRIA | Druze Hostage Killed

CSW is saddened by news that one of the hostages abducted by the Islamic State (IS, Daesh) during the attack on Suwayda in southern Syria on July 25 was executed Aug. 2.

CSW's sources confirmed that Muhannad Zouqan, 19, was executed Aug. 2. IS announced his execution on Aug. 6 after negotiations with community leaders to free the hostages reached a deadlock.

On July 25, IS terrorists conducted a number of suicide attacks in markets and residential areas in As-Suwayda Governorate, and stormed villages in the region. The attackers are believed to be among the IS terrorists who were evacuated from Al-Yarmouk Camp in southern Damascus a few months ago following a deal with the Syrian government.

According to CSW's sources, more than 300 people were killed, 298 injured and 37 abducted in the attacks. The victims included women and children. In some instances, entire families were killed. A pregnant woman has reportedly given birth in captivity after she was kidnapped together with her three children. On July 26, IS's media outlet Amaq posted videos of the executions of some of the abductees.

The As-Suwayda region is mainly occupied by the Druze ethnoreligious group. The Syrian Druze are believed to constitute around 3.2 percent of the population. Originating from the Near East, the Druze self-identify as "Unitarians" or "the People of Monotheism." They are deemed by hard-liner Islamists to be heretics, and in the past, their communities in Idlib Governorate in northwestern Syria suffered several attacks.

Sources close to CSW believe the Syrian and the Russian authorities, who effectively control the region, may be complicit through deliberately reducing their military and security presence on the fronts with IS. Many community leaders believe the authorities are doing this to force those who refused to take part in the conflict to side with the government and contribute to the military efforts by encouraging young men to join the army.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW extends its deepest condolences to Muhannad Zouqan's family and to all who have lost loved ones in these deplorable attacks. It is worrying that Syrian and Russian forces have failed to prevent them, leaving the local community to take up arms to defend itself. We urge the authorities to prioritize the protection of vulnerable communities, and we reiterate our call for the international community to step up efforts to reach a sustainable solution for the ongoing conflict in Syria."