

"A Child's Endless Wait: Salim Ribban and His Abducted Father"

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In times of wars and conflicts, the threads of life intertwine with different colors, between hope and pain, joy and sorrow. In the heart of this complex fabric, human stories emerge that touch the heart, telling the suffering of the innocent who pay a high price for events they did not choose. The story of Salim Ribban, a Yemeni child, is one of these stories worth telling.

In the depths of the Hajour mountains in Yemen, where nature sits atop trees and the mountains rise high, the heart of a child named Salim Ribban beats. He was born in a time of war, where hopes hover between grief and pain, and the child awaits things he should not have to await.

Salim Yahya Ribban began his life crying like every newborn, but Salim's crying was not like other children's cries; it was an indication of extended sorrow whose end is unknown. He cried for a father who went out searching for a midwife for his mother, who was in labor under the sounds of shells, the roar of cannons, and the bursts of bullets in the war coinciding with his birth in his hometown of Hajour, Hajjah Governorate (northeast of the capital Sana'a), in March 2019, and has not returned until now.

The father went out facing danger and the war atmosphere filled with death and destruction, with the image of an incoming child planting the smile that had disappeared, the joy that had faded, and reviving the hope battling despair. But birth is life, and war creates nothing but death. The Houthis kidnapped the father, who failed to convince them of his wife's critical condition and her need for him during the labor pains, missing the moment of birth, and with his absence, the family's joy with their new baby.

The child, who is now over five years old, has not seen his father, of whom he hears confusing and questioning stories. Where is he? Why hasn't he returned? What does his face look like, which is carried in a picture kept by his mother and washed with her tears whenever longing overwhelms her and the pain of separation takes over.

Salim's suffering grows day by day, and his sense of orphanhood grows with his body. His tragedy details unfold whenever he sees fathers playing with their children and taking them to the market or the mosque, pushing him to repeatedly ask his bewildered question about the secret of his father's absence and when he will return. Only his mother's tears and the echoes of his questions in his siblings' throats, who share his pain and the same confused questions, answer him. His older sister Hamas lives in a bad psychological state because of her attachment to her father and her intense love for him, being deprived of him due to his abduction, reflecting on her academic performance and weak appetite. His other sisters are not in a better condition than Hamas or Salim.

Salim's family awaits happy news and rushes to open the door whenever they hear a knock or a sound, and their eyes are glued to the road, hoping that the father will return after his absence, bringing back smiles and filling the house with laughter that disappeared with his long absence.

They wish for his quick release or to know his fate to reveal the gloom that has hung over their home since he left.

Salim and his siblings are not exceptions among children deprived of their abducted fathers, nor is their family a unique case. They are one of thousands of families that have lived through the tragedy of the abducted breadwinner's absence, turning their lives into endless waiting, continuous sorrow, and anticipation for an absent one whose arrival time is unknown. The prolonged war and extended conflict in Yemen, and the violations by the conflicting parties, have filled prisons with civilians abducted from their homes and workplaces, creating sorrow and suffering in every house whose breadwinner is behind the bars.

Olfat Al-Rifa'i, the monitoring officer at the Abductees' Mothers Association, confirms that the humanitarian situation for families whose breadwinner is abducted behind bars worsens as the abduction period extends and the absence period lengthens. She also confirms that there is no imminent breakthrough in this dark humanitarian file even with the silencing of weapons and the calm of the military battle for more than two years. There are still 420 abducted civilians, including women, and 73 forcibly disappeared, according to Al-Rifa'i.

The repercussions of this escalating problem are not limited to creating continuous suffering for the abducted only, but they also affect hundreds of families living a difficult life swaying between fear and hope, along with thousands of children who did not participate in the war and were not the cause of it but bear its consequences and pay its hefty price without any fault except witnessing a time with no place for safe childhood or room for joy.

Salim and his family are no exceptions in this long war. They are part of thousands of families suffering from the absence of the abducted breadwinner. The war and conflicts have filled prisons with innocent civilians and created grief and suffering in every house. Children who were not part of the war are paying its price without any fault, and Salim's story is a cry for every child dreaming of his father's return, a call for peace and safety every child deserves.