

Alleged militia member associated with Syrian regime arrested in the Netherlands on suspicion of war crimes

The International Crimes Team of the Dutch police arrested a 34-year-old man in Kerkrade on Tuesday 24 May 2022 on suspicion of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria in 2013. The suspect had been living in the Netherlands since 2020 and had applied for asylum there. At the end of 2020 the Dutch national crime squad received tips that the man would have been a member of a prominent Syrian militia that fought on the side of President Assad's regime in the Syrian civil war. Never before has anyone been arrested under these suspicions in the Netherlands who allegedly sided with the Syrian regime.

The suspect is charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes. He is also accused of participating in an organization whose aim is to commit international crimes. An investigation led by the Netherlands Public Prosecution Service gave indications that the suspect was involved in the violent arrest of a citizen in January 2013 who was later tortured in captivity.

Pro-regime militia Liwa al-Quds

The suspect is said to have been part of the pro-regime militia Liwa al-Quds, that works closely with the Syrian intelligence services and the Russian armed forces. Liwa al-Quds was founded in the Palestinian refugee camp al-Nayrab near Aleppo, located in the north, near the Turkish border. The densely populated al-Nayrab camp, where the suspect was also born, is strategically located near an airport. As a result, there was a lot of fighting after the outbreak of the war. Militias in the camp were soon armed by the Syrian regime. In 2013, the militias merged into Liwa al-Quds. In January 2013, the suspect, together with other members of his unit, the Syrian military security service and the intelligence service of the air force, allegedly arrested a civilian in his home in the al-Nayrab camp. The civilian was mistreated during the arrest and later taken to a Syrian Air Force intelligence prison, where he is said to have been tortured.

Suspicion of crimes against humanity and war crimes

The war in Syria has been going on for 11 years now. The conflict began in 2011 with peaceful protests against the Assad regime and has since cost some 400,000 lives. The Syrian government and militias have committed widespread violations of human rights and the law of war, according to the United Nations. The militias were an important link in a widespread and systematic attack on the civilian population. They were used, for example, in the crackdown on demonstrations of civilians, and to arrest civilians. According to the Public Prosecution Service, Liwa al-Quds can be classified as a criminal organization that is aimed at committing international crimes. The Islamic State has previously been identified as such a criminal organization.

The suspect will be brought before the examining magistrate at the Court of The Hague on Friday 27 May 2022.