Beat: Local

Syria releases over 2,000 captives in exchange for 48 Iranians

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USPA News - Over 2,000 civilian captives have been released in Syria in exchange for 48 Iranian prisoners, officials said Wednesday. Personnel from Qatar and Turkey have been negotiating the release of thousands of captives during the ongoing armed conflict in Syria.

Turkish NGO, IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, facilitated the exchange, mediating the talks through its President, Bülent Y?ld?r?m. According to the NGO, a total of 2,130 civilian prisoners being held by the Syrian regime were released in exchange of 48 Iranian nationals that were held captive by the Syrian opposition. Reports indicate that the Iranians were released in the suburb of Douma in Damascus at the Sheraton Hotel where they celebrated their release with Iranian officials from its embassy. Meanwhile, the civilian captives were placed in a bus and taken from the Interior Ministry to the Palace of Justice for a judge to sign their release. While Iranian authorities have stated that those captive were Shiite pilgrims, it is uncertain what they were doing in Syria, although rebels have claimed they were members of Iran`s Revolutionary Guard. The negotiation has been highly criticized, saying the Syrian regime is strongly influenced by Iran. Having little interest in Syrian soldiers, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad released thousands of people in exchange for Iranian nationals only. The crisis in Syria began as a pro-democracy protest movement in March 2011, similar to those across the Middle East and North Africa. The Syrian government violently cracked down on the protests, setting off an armed conflict between pro-Assad forces and anti-government forces. In the beginning of the year, the United Nations stated that over 60,000 people, much more than what opposition groups had estimated, have been killed during the conflict. The investigation by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, identifying the list of reported killings by verifying first and last names, as well as the date and location of the deaths. Most of the victims have been civilians, with well over 1 million displaced since the uprising against President al-Assad began.

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