

## **Syria rebels pass 'Kurd hostages to jihadists'**

**By AFP**

**11 August 2013**

BEIRUT — Syrian rebel fighters kidnapped 13 Kurds in the northern province of Aleppo on Sunday, turning them over to jihadist fighters already holding 250 abducted Kurds, an NGO said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the 13 were snatched at a roadblock in the Sfeira region of Aleppo and passed them on to Al-Nusra Front, a jihadist group affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

Al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), another Al-Qaeda-linked group operating in Syria, have abducted more than 250 Syrian Kurds since the end of July.

The majority were taken hostage as the two groups overran two Kurdish villages, Tall Aren and Tall Hassel, at the end of July.

Syria's Kurds have been battling jihadist fighters for months in northern and northeastern Syria, where the minority hopes to establish an autonomous zone.

The clashes have intensified since mid-July, when Kurdish fighters pushed jihadists out of the village of Ras al-Ain and its adjacent border crossing with Turkey.

The fighting has left dozens of dead on both sides, according to the Britain-based Observatory.

In Tall Aren and Tall Hassel, at least 26 Kurds, including 10 fighters, were killed by jihadist groups between July 29 and August 5, according to the monitoring group, which relies on a network of activists, doctors and lawyers on the ground.

Syria's Kurds have incurred the wrath of many rebel fighters, jihadists and more moderate factions, for failing to openly side with the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

Instead, the minority has focused on protecting its areas and strengthening autonomous rule.

Ties between the jihadist groups and other rebel organisations are also complex.

In some areas, rebel groups work alongside the jihadist groups, but in others, including in Idlib province of the north, tensions between the two sides have erupted into open, deadly conflict.

Rebel groups largely welcomed the arrival of jihadist organisations like Nusra, which includes foreign fighters among its ranks, in the early days of their armed uprising against the regime that has cost more than 100,000 lives since March 2011.

But initial enthusiasm for the supplies and fighting skills of the groups has waned amid accusations of abuses by members of Nusra and ISIS.

Copyright © 2013 AFP. All rights reserved.