



komela Mafê Mirovan ya Cizîrê û Efrîn  
منظمة حقوق الإنسان في الجزيرة و عفرين  
Human Rights Organization in Jazira and Afrin



## **Kurdish Afrin, A plundered Settlement under the Reign of Terror and Jungle Law**

### **A dossier on the situation of Afrin under the Turkish occupation**

*From: Human Rights Organization/ Jazira and Afrin / Syria*

*To: World Public Opinion*

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*Shahbaa's camps for Afrin IDPs, late September, 2019.*

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### **1-Executive Summary**

Since Turkish troops and pro-Ankara Arab and Turkmenli rebels captured the predominantly Kurdish Afrin enclave from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), media outlets and human rights groups, including Amnesty International, have documented widespread abuses tantamount to war crimes.

On daily basis, the Kurds, who have now become the minority versus Arab and Turkmen settlers, are subjected to "fascist-style violence," and attempts to "reshape local pluralist character and empower extremists.

From kidnappings for ransom to armed robberies and torture, remaining Kurdish residents of Afrin say they are suffering a litany of abuses at the hands of Turkish-backed rebels. The spectre of frequent infighting among these mercenary factions casts a shade of doubt and distrust over Turkey's role in this divide and rule policy.

Only 30 percent of Kurds returned to their homes after the massive exodus, only to find them "stripped of furniture, electrical appliances and all decoration" in large-scale looting. The Syrian Observation for Human Rights dubbed the day of the fall of Afrin "the locust day".

The ongoing human rights abuses perpetrated openly and in flagrant disregard for international norms and standards, you might think, with the same arrogant contempt for human rights that the Turkish AKP regime of Recep Tayyip Erdogan has grown used to in Turkey itself – with no force, at present capable of encouraging the regime in a more humane or democratic direction.

No one stops the depredations of Arab and Turkmen rebels and all complaints lodged to Turkey-appointed local councils and Turkish forces fall on deaf ears.

Most of Afrin's original residents now live in the squalid Shahba camps near Aleppo, their houses commandeered by newcomers bussed in from Eastern Ghouta and other former opposition strongholds.

Those who have clung on to their properties say they must contend with unrelenting threats of abduction and extortion, and harrasments.

Afrin, last, season shipped its most famed product, olive oil from its vast orchards, to Turkey.

Schools now enforce gender segregation, religious schools are being opened and Turkish flags fly over public buildings and portraits of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hang in shops.

"Turkish forces are giving Syrian armed groups free rein to commit serious human rights abuses against civilians in the northern city of Afrin", Amnesty International said before, following an in-depth investigation into life under the Turkish military occupation. According to an Amnesty International report, Turkish forces occupying Afrin are giving allied Syrian armed groups free rein to commit serious human rights abuses against civilians."

### **2-Introduction**

#### **A- Geography of Afrin:**

Located in the northwestern corner of Aleppo governorate and bordered by Turkey to the north and west, Afrin (also known as Kurd Dag) is known for its olive industry and picturesque rolling landscapes. Named after its river, Afrin is famous for the beauty of its mountains, pine and oak forests, and vast olive groves, as it enjoys ample water, good rainfalls and rich agricultural resources with 19million olive and vegetable trees.

Afrin is the smallest of the three Syrian Kurdish territories in the north of Syria. It is a 3400 square km strip of land inhabited by the overwhelming Kurdish majority for hundreds of years. Many of Afrin's Arab minority were ejected by the Turks from Hatay in the 1940s whilst the al-Boubana and 'Umayrat clans originally came to this area as shepherds and were subsequently given lands by the Baath regime during "Land Reform Program" in the 1960s. Afrin the city is the capital of a tiny enclave that had a pre-war population of 570,000, according to the 2004 census. When the opposition rebels, including global jihadists, overrun the city of Aleppo in 2012, Afrin became home to many more, given the influx of 500,000 displaced Kurds from their neighbourhoods in Aleppo.

#### **B- Afrin During The Syrian Civil War:**

For six years Afrin had been under constant shelling by Turkish army and daily attacks by various armed groups, was sponsored by Turkey, from the opposition-controlled areas to the south and east. However, against all odds, Afrin managed not only to withstand those attacks but also to maintain its security, stability and development.



In fact, the Kurds successfully managed to maintain security and stability, but a lot of issues remained unresolved, owing to blockade and encroachments by Isis and the opposition factions who jointly under supervision of Turkish intelligence advisers imposed a choking siege around Afrin.

Then, in February 2014 Afrin was announced by its Kurds and Arabs a self-administration canton as part of Rojava. But the economic situation under assaults and embargo forced the locals to depend on smuggling to address their basic needs like food, fuel and weapons at high prices.

At the beginning of 2016 the blockade was partly lifted as the YPG forces, aided by Russian air raids, dislodged Isis and the opposition rebels to forge their way along a large section of Shahba regions. Thus, the corridor with both Aleppo and areas controlled by SDF in the east was opened through areas controlled by the Syrian government.

The defacto administration ran schools, hospitals, courts, municipalities and other institutions along with Sherawa refugee camp despite almost zero international assistance and a non-stop campaign by Turkey and its allies to distort facts in an effort to Satanize the local forces and the administration internationally, amid daily armed provocations, bombardment and depredations on the border

The administration succeeded in creating and operating robust civilian and military institutions. On the face of it, Ankara saw all this structure as the framework of a terrorist organization that posed "a grave threat to Turkey's national security". But, in fact, the Turks had old greeds to annex not only Afrin, but also a 40km wide belt of Syrian northern territory, extending from the Mediterranean to Kirkuk in Iraq as part and parcel of their Nationalist Covenant.

### **C- Old greeds under the pretext of "Turkish national security"**

Recep Tayyip Erdogan had previously announced again and again, "We aim to give Afrin back to its rightful owners", in a thinly veiled warning to occupy Afrin and ethnically cleanse the region of its Kurdish inhabitants. Today Erdogan, backed by both Iran and Russia, is hurling incendiary warnings, reiterating the same thing about SDF-controlled areas, to the east of the Euphrate River as another step in acheiving the Nationalist Covenant.

### **D- The Invasion of Afrin, January 20,2018.**

Following the failure of negotiations between Moscow and the YPG to turn Afrin over to the Syrian government, As Russia withdrew its small contingent from its small base in Kafr Jana toward the Tall Rifaat area on 19 January 2018.

This was considered a green light from Russia for Turkey to launch its assault.

This Russian-Turkish understanding concerning Afrin led to a total collapse of the de-escalation zones that Turkey had guaranteed in the Astana process. Turkey launched operation 'Olive Branch' simultaneously with a major operation to take over territory in Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus, which had been included in the de-escalation agreement.

Remarkably, the YPG and YPJ held off the invaders of Afrin for two months without any moral support of a single major world power. Even the US refused to lift a finger to defend Afrin. The assault and the taking of the Kurdish city was consummated amid the deafening silence and disinterest of the international community, particularly of Europe and NATO, under US leadership.

### **2.E-The Sack of Afrin**

On 23 March, Turkey announced that it had taken complete control of the Afrin region after two months of fierce fighting in which both sides suffered sizeable casualties. Besides, hundreds of civilians were killed and thousands more were injured while hundreds of thousands of Afrin's residents fled the onslaught to Shahbaa, Aleppo and eastern Euphrates, leaving their homes at the mercy of Turkish troops and their Arab and Turkmen proxies.

Turkey-backed vandals commenced with an orgy of rape, arson and pillage, ripping Afrin and its 400 villages and towns of all valuables hailing, "Allah Akbar ". Like marauders they broke into shops, restaurants and homes, stealing food, electronic equipment, olive oil, furniture blankets and other basic necessities. They stole all cars, tractors, trucks, motorcycles, machines, livestock and chickens. The stolen animals and booty were transported on the stolen vehicles outside the city to Idleb, Ezzaz, Jarablus and even to Turkey itself. Some broad daylight captured videos of looting and arson were widely circulated in world media.



Now, more than a year and six months since the Turkish army established control over the Afrin border region, how has Turkey transformed the administration of the area? What policies has it pursued to expand its influence and to depopulate the area of its native Kurds? Why has Turkey so given rein to its FSA proxies to perpetrate appalling human rights violations? In which aspects should Turkey be held responsible for the endless streak of crimes committed against remaining Kurds and their homeland? Do Turkey's policies suggest that Ankara has a plan to integrate the area into Turkey? In which fields are Turkish policies the most evident and influential?

This study first discusses the security and military structures that Turkey has established to exert control over the region and the role played by Syrian opposition military factions. It then proceeds to examine its local governance as a means of imposing facts on the ground through the establishment of a new Turkey-linked political class and efforts to tie local councils, civil society organisations and public services directly to Turkey. The study details human rights violations, focusing on demographic change, destruction of nature, looting of economic resources and erasing of culture. It concludes with the negative implications for social and political stability in the region and a message to the free world so that these acts that are tantamount to grave war crimes should not go unpunished. This study relies primarily on both media and Human Rights Organizations as well as eye-witness accounts.

According to the UN report, over 50 armed groups operate in Afrin, including Sultan Morad Division, alHamzat Division, Ahrar al-Sham, Amshad brigade, Faylaq al-Sham, Jaish al-Nukhba, Ahrar alSharqiya, Jaish al Sharqiya, Jabhat al-Shamiya, Nur al-Din al-Zanki, and Suleyman Shah brigade, among others.

The residents in Afrin describe "general absence of the rule of law, with parties in control either unwilling or unable to provide effective redress or, in some cases, extorting bribes from victims in order to do so." These developments come despite changes in administrative, judicial, and executive structures in the region.

Some residents pointed to the lack of discipline armed groups demonstrate, especially with their involvement in pillaging, arbitrary detention, and abduction for ransom as systematic efforts and directions by the Turkish state to completely depopulate the area of its native residents.

### **3- Turkey is the ultimate authority in Afrin**

Turkey is fast integrating Syrian territories under its military occupation to its own state structure by appointing civil servants, Turkifying school curricula, managing local judiciaries and law enforcement, and putting into practice a Sunni Islamic agenda in all these, recent reports by government media revealed.

Once Turkey controlled Afrin, Turkey's army and MIT established a large number of military and intelligence command posts and some new military bases are still being constructed.

Some bases are located on the Turkish-Syrian border and others throughout eastern Afrin facing Shahba on the front line with Kurdish forces.

Furthermore, Turkey has established an intelligence station with multiple branches in Afrin's subdistricts.

#### **3.A-Turkey's military bases in Afrin:**

Turkey has established a large number of military command posts and new military bases are still being constructed,

##### **3.B- Syrian Rebels' Task Force**

Turkey has established a Syrian Task Force affiliated with the Turkish Police Special Operations Department within the Turkish General Security Directorate.

##### **3.C- The Syrian National Army**

It was established early 2018. The army was divided into three brigades (1st Corps, 2nd Corps, and 3rd Corps).

The National Army is under Ankara's Command under the supervision of the Syrian Interim Government's Ministry of Defence. The National Army factions were initially distributed among three legions: The National Army, the Levant Front and the Sultan Murad Division. Later, all armed factions in areas under Turkish influence, including Jaysh al-Islam and the al-Rahman Legion (which had been expelled from Eastern Ghouta), were integrated under the banner of the National Army, and Ankara relied on them to impose control over Afrin.

##### **3.D- Military Police Units**



On 20 February 2018, Turkey established a military police administration in the 'Euphrates Shield' area under the control of the Syrian Interim Government's Ministry of Defence to rein in excesses and violations committed there by fighters belonging to the three National Army legions. Ironically, this military police is responsible for major acts of encroachments and depredations against local Kurds.

### **3.E- The Civilian Police**

Ankara appointed Lieutenant Colonel Rami Tlass, a Syrian Arab Army defector from the city of al-Rastan (Homs governorate), as leader of the police and general national security forces for the entire Afrin region. The lists of applicants accepted into the police force issued in February 2019 indicate that the policemen come primarily from Eastern Ghouta and Homs, followed by individuals displaced from Idlib and Hama. The lists include only three local Arab inhabitants of Afrin, and no Kurds, among the 301 accepted. This suggests that Turkey aims to exclude local Arabs and Kurds from the security sector.

### **4-Lawlessness and thuggery speak louder than peace and order in Afrin:**

According to a UN report, over 50 armed groups operate in Afrin, including Ahrar al-Sham, Sultan Murad division, Suleyman Shah (Amshat) brigade, Faylaq al-Sham, Al-Hamzat Brigade, Jaish al-Nukhba, Ahrar and Jaish al Sharqiya, Jabhat al-Shamiya, Nur al-Din al-Zanki, and Sultan Mehmed Fatih brigade, Jaish Al-Islam among others.

Between bandits, militiamen, and wayfarers, Afrin is barely recognisable, say Kurdish locals who have made it back. "It's not the Afrin we know," they say "Too many strange faces. Businesses have been taken over by the new settlers, stores changed to Damascene names, properties gone.

But residents say not enough is done to curb violations. And it is not only Kurds who have fallen victim to the lawlessness. The Syrian Observatory published on the 1st of June 2019 that the Turkish forces and the Syrian factions loyal to them seek to displace the remaining Kurdish residents through daily encroachments on Kurds and their property. Systematic acts of theft, looting, taxation, and royalties on people's livelihoods, in addition to kidnappings.

#### **4.A-Abductions for ransom is a booming trade:**

Turkey-backed FSA armed factions systematically carry out arbitrary arrests of Kurdish citizens, under various charges and allegations such as "being an agent of PKK/PYD or former affiliate of the self-administration".

Arrests target both genders, men and women, who are often held captive for ransom. Abduction for a ransom has become a popular trade adopted by most factions, in an attempt to collect the largest possible amount of money, and to clamp down on the remaining population in the region to force them to leave the area. The London-based SOHR monitored that the factions have transferred abductees to detention and custody centers in civilian homes that were seized and turned into headquarters for the pro-Turkey factions, which share influence zones inside Afrin.

So far, more than 6000 people have been arrested and abducted for ransom.

The Britain-based SOHR Observatory says it has so far documented at least 3000 people abducted and taken to "hostage houses and secret prisons" and that 2090 people of the kidnapped are still in confinement or unaccounted for.

Detainees are tortured and beaten, their relatives asked to pay to secure their release. Abductions have become "a way to make money," the monitor says.

Many victims are transferred to the notorious Al-Raii town prison or into Turkey itself.

The Syrian Observatory has monitored more than once that the factions send audio or video clips of abducted people, blindfolded and tortured at gunpoint, to their families, demanding huge instant ransom be paid or the hostages be shot or beheaded. The already impoverished people have no choice but to call their relatives.

The victims are often unable to identify their abductors, referring instead generally to armed groups, Free Syrian Army (FSA) affiliates, or the different Turkey-backed security departments..

"Although victims and their families in Afrin often report such cases to military police, civilian police, and Turkish authorities, there is little effect", the UN report said.

### **4.B-Horrors of Detention Centres**

Detention centres are either confiscated homes of displaced Kurds turned into headquarters for armed factions or prisons run by Turkish MIT and Grey Wolves in Turkmen towns east of Azaz, such as prisons of Sejjo and Al Raii. There is another big prison in the border village of Midan Akbaz, Rajo, in the far north of Afrin.

Detainees are interrogated by armed groups and Turkish officers. "All of the questions focus on detainees' activities on social media, and accusations of being affiliated with the YPG/PKK/PYD," says Juwan Has who was detained three times in a row, and each time his family had to pay huge sums for his release, before he managed to bribe a warlord in Ahrar alSharqiyya to help him slink into SDF-controlled Minbij.

According to them the interrogators and torturers spoke Turkish and Arabic and used dozen torture techniques including Lashing, the Fuel, Bisat al-Rih (Flying Carpet), Shabeh (Ghost), German Chair, the Biter, the Tyre among others.

Moreover, women caught by the militants were often sexually abused and raped.



On May15,2019 SOHR and Turkish media outlets published that Turkish intelligence units and Turkish-backed Syrian armed groups had transferred more than 600 Kurdish prisoners from Ma'sara prison in Azaz to unknown destinations..

#### **4.C-Harassments and Abuses Against Kurdish Women**

Invasion, occupation, and displacement have been devastating for all of Afrin's people— especially women, who have been targeted for violence and intimidation by occupying forces and who still struggle to care for their families with the few resources they can find.

During Turkish invasion, Turkish-backed rebels mutilated and then filmed the body of one of their female fighters called Barin Kobani who had taken part in a US-backed campaign to drive the Islamic State terrorists from the northern town of Kobani.

SHOR confirmed that the footage was filmed in the village of Qurna near the Turkish border in Bulbl. In the footage, a dozen armed Turkey-backed rebels gather around the badly mutilated body of a woman lying on the ground saying , "Allah Akbar".

SDF spokesman, Mustafa Bali, said the video was reason to continue fighting back against Turkey and its allies. "Imagine the savagery of these invaders with the bodies of our daughters. How would they behave if they took control of our neighbourhoods?" he wrote on Facebook. "All this hatred and barbarity leaves us with a single option: to continue the resistance."

Those Kurds who remained in Afrin are subjected to the same kind of ethnic discrimination, looting, and sexual violence that ISIS perpetrated against the Yazidis in Iraq. At least more than two hundred girls have been reported as having been abducted, and their families fear they are being held as sex slaves.

So far, more than five hundred Kurdish girls have been forcibly married to members of the armed factions. SOHR says that armed factions often storm houses when the men are out to molest women under gunpoint. In most cases women are unable even to tell their husbands, resulting in some recorded cases of suicide among young women

#### **4.D-Kurds don't dare leave their homes**

Rebel factions often accuse Kurdish residents of being loyalists of the Damascus regime, or members of the YPG or , the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) .For this reason Kurds don't dare to travel inside Afrin or even to go to their fields.

Salim, 50, owns several olive groves in the fertile agricultural land outside the city but he can no longer reach them without permission from the new authorities.

"If you don't get a paper from the local council, you can't enter your own land," the father of three complains.

"Even with authorisation, the roads are dangerous for Kurdish civilians."A rebel faction could find you on the way to your land and kidnap you for a ransom, ranging from \$15,000 to \$50,000", he tells AFP.

Some analysts described these acts of terrorism as "very serious," and suggested they could be used as "evidence of war crimes."

Nicholas A. Heras, a Middle East security analyst at the Washington-based Center for a New American Security, said the behavior of Turkish-backed, Syrian rebels in Afrin "has been deplorable."

In fact, local Kurds and Arabs miss Afrin's calmer days, before its seizure by Turkey and the Turkey-backed rebels.

"Injustice, injustice, and no one is holding them accountable," they complain.

#### **4.E- Infighting among Turkey-backed rebel groups**

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic submitted its findings, gathered between July 11, 2018 and January 10, 2019, to the Human Rights Council.

It estimates more than 50 armed groups, including Free Syrian Army (FSA) affiliates, are active around the Afrin and Azaz areas in northwest Syria, contributing to the collapse of law and order, a declining security situation, and widespread abuses against civilians without redress.

Fighting for control over confiscated homes and property between the myriad armed factions increased significantly in the months after the operation concluded.

"Frequent clashes included the use of car bombs, assassination tactics and improvised explosive devices, particularly in the densely populated centers of Afrin and Azaz cities, which killed and injured hundreds of civilians, including women and children," the report added.

Violent clashes that erupt among Turkish-backed rebel factions in the Kurdish enclave of Afrin terrorise both locals and the settlers alike.

According to the report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released in July2018,, the security situation in regions under Turkish-backed rebel control remained volatile, with internal fighting among Turkish-backed groups.

"In areas such as Afrin, al-Bab, Azaz, and Jarablus, the security situation remains volatile, with de facto authorities currently unable or failing to act to ensure public order and safety – a situation exacerbated by



fighting between various armed groups made worse by the arrival of additional fighters from armed groups from other areas of Syria, including Eastern Ghouta,” the report noted.

“During the formation of these Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army factions, it was clear that they will not be used to fight the regime, since Turkey abandoned the goal of toppling Assad in 2016,” Elizabeth Tsurkov, a Research Fellow at the Forum for Regional Thinking, an Israeli think-tank, who specializes in Syria, told Kurdistan 24.

“Therefore, these groups attracted people desperate for money or people interested in having power over others. At the same time, due to lack of combat on the fronts, the fighters have too much free time on their hands, and they lack any sense of purpose. They also know that due to Turkish protection, infighting among them cannot be exploited by the regime to make advances and take over their territories,” she concluded.

## **5- Systematic demographic change and ethnic cleansing**

As wretched as they are, aggrieved Kurds are deeply concerned that Afrin's Kurdish identity could soon be lost once and for all. The wave of displacement has had seismic effects on local demographics, between fleeing Kurds and incoming settlers, some of whom had themselves fled conflict in other parts of Syria.

### **5.A-. Native Inhabitants Before, During and After the Occupation:**

According to a pre-Syrian conflict census, the population of the Afrin area was 523,258, but when the Syrian rebels, including global jihadists stormed the city of Aleppo in 2012, nearly half a million inhabitants, mostly Kurds, sought refuge in Afrin because, first, Kurds were able to maintain security and order and, second, because most of them originally came from these areas. Besides, thousands of Arab families from neighbouring Arab towns also fled to Afrin, which was relatively stable and secure under YPG rule. However, as encroachments by Isis and FSA rebels escalated against Afrin during blockade imposed around Afrin by FSA factions and jihadists, including Isis, nearly half the population, especially the young, crossed into Turkey and subsequently to Europe and elsewhere because of poor living conditions, overcrowding and because of the opposition of some to the defacto-administration.

The total number of residents was estimated at around half a million before operation ‘Olive Branch.’ The local Kurdish population was estimated at around 350,000. In addition, around 150,000 persons displaced from other parts of Aleppo, were living in Afrin.

Following the Turkish occupation of Afrin, families of loyalist Arab and Turkmen militias from the "Euphrates Shield" areas and other parts of Syria have been since pouring into the city, replacing hundreds of thousands of Kurds who fled the occupation forces.

Today, less than thirty percent of Afrin native residents live in Afrin and its countryside.

### **5.B: Arab and Turkmen settlers brought in by Turkey**

During the Turkish military operation with its Arab allies, most Afrin residents fled the onslaught to nearby regime-controlled towns for safety, vacating the city in the process. Their places were soon filled with opposition fighters and their families. The arrivals became a daily routine.

Families from the province of Idlib were the first to turn up and settle in the surrounding villages. Before long people from Azaz, al-Bab and Jarablus came and settled in villages around Sharran and Rajo and Afrin the city where they occupied the best homes

Following the surrender of opposition forces in Eastern Ghouta in April 2018 and in the northern Hama countryside in May 2018, and the expulsion of armed factions to the northern Aleppo countryside, Turkey took the opportunity to resettle displaced persons in the Afrin area. Many people were relocated from the al-Bab area to Afrin. According to a precise unpublished census conducted by Afrin local council at the end of May 2019, the number of people displaced to Afrin the city alone had reached 87,936. Displaced persons from Ghouta and Aleppo Governorate respectively represented 51 percent and 20 percent of this group.

One could add these figures to the thousands of families who fled fighting in the northern Hama countryside and Idlib to Afrin until late August 2019.

The Sultan Murad Division has also relocated hundreds of its Turkmen fighters' families from the 'Euphrates Shield' zone to Sharan subdistrict, which is under its control. Another 600 displaced families from the Albil camp to the east of Azaz were relocated east of Afrin, in addition to an estimated 600 Turkmen families resettled in Bilbil subdistrict.



"You see the clear intent to replace the Kurdish population with [displaced] Arabs," says Fabrice Balanche, an analyst from the Washington Institute.

The issue of demographic change in Afrin has not yet attracted significant attention, in part because Turkish control over the local security services makes it nearly impossible for Syrian research organisations to operate there. On the other hand, the movement of forcibly displaced people from Ghouta, Homs and Daraa to Afrin might be considered part of a Turkish plan to settle these groups permanently, with the aim of shifting the ethnic population structure in favour of Arabs and Turkmen.

### **5.C: Kurdish homes were Erdogan's awards for his conquering rebels**

During the war Turkey's president announced that he would reward each fighter taking part in "The Olive Branch" operation with a new furnished home once Afrin was captured. In fact, he was referring to the homes of native Kurds.

Erdogan had said that he wanted "to give Afrin back to its real owners."

SOHR reported that "each faction is trying to increase the number of its fighters by announcing "offers" to resettle the new recruits in Afrin, and give them homes and salaries to join its ranks."

### **5.D: Statistics released by media outlets:**

A source inside Afrin who did not want to be named told Rudaw TV. Station that Arabs now make up at least 70 percent of the 200,000 people living in Afrin city alone.

In Mubata and three surrounding villages alone 4000 Arab families have settled. Since the turn of events only 1,000 Kurds have been able to return to their homes and farms, facing fourfold their number of newly-settled Arabs.

In the small village of Routanli, fifty Turkic families from Central Asia, belonging to Samaqand brigade have been resettled.

The new settlers are all armed to the teeth terrorizing the natives while it is forbidden for local Kurds to carry even knives.

Many Kurds who tried to return claim they were threatened by armed groups and forced to leave. Rashid Mohammed, a pharmacy worker, told Rudaw that he went to check on his home in Bilbil on May 8, 2018, but an armed group kicked him out. Assad Qasim, an engineer, was also told to leave soon after he returned to his village of Qurna.

Rudaw also reported that 12 Kurdish villages near Bilbil have become no-go zones for their former Kurdish inhabitants due to a heavy military presence the resettlement of families of Turkmen militias belonging to Sultan Murad Legion.

1,725 Arab and Turkmen families are reported to have settled in the following seven villages: Sharran, Kharaba Shara, Sinka, Matina, Qitma, Maydanke, Kafrjana. 172 families have also settled in rather distant villages from the town.

The town of Rajo is one place where the 700 families of outsiders outnumber the original population by two to one.

One video footage circulated on the Internet last year showing a Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighter calling on his friends, relatives and people of Qabun east of the capital Damascus to come to the villages near Afrin and turn the place "into a new Qabun".

According to the statistics published by pro- the Syrian opposition the Response Coordinators on July 9, 2019, 28,461 families had been relocated in Afrin since March, distributed as the following: 20,000 families in Afrin District, 115 families in Sharran sub-district, 317 families in Rajo sub-district, and 250 families in Mabatli sub-district, as well as 20 families in Bubul sub-district, and 650 families in Shaykh al-Hadid sub-district while the districts of Bafiloun and Jindires were still under the process of surveying the number of locals.

6863 families were displaced from Damascus and its countryside, and they were distributed as it follows: 5800 families in the Afrin District, 280 families in Rajo sub-district, 420 families in the Mabatli sub-district, and 83 families in Bulbul sub-district, in addition to 30 families in the area of Bafiloun, and 250 families in Jindires. Likewise, the districts of Sharran and Shaykh al-Hadid were still under the process of counting the number of rebel families coming to these areas from Rif Dimashq.



Kefer Cenê District was completely Arabized and Turkified through the resettlement of 4000 families of the armed rebels . Moreover, at least 300 families of FSA members were relocated to the village of Kefer Sefrê.

The statistics issued by the Response Coordinators regarding the population of Afrin, after the intervention of Turkey in March, 2018, are based on the distribution of relief aid and do not indicate the true specific number of Arab settlers in each region

### **5.E: New identity cards and registry offices:**

ID cards are being issued to pro-Turkey operatives, politicians and employees at the a local council in both Turkish and Arabic languages. The Turkish flag is printed on the cards.

Chieftains, or Mukhtars, have been appointed by local government run by the Turkish Mayor of Hatay..They have the authority to issue or revoke IDs and marriage and birth certificates.

The process is intended to change the demography of the region. A larger Arab and Turkmen population is likely to form a majority in the area's local council elections.

### **6-Economic terrorism based on arson, confiscation and ghanima.**

Militant factions are not only arresting innocent civilians, but they are also imposing harsh taxes and royalties on the already economically-ailing local population.

The royalties are imposed on locals who move on the main and sub-roads, where varying sums of money are paid to checkpoints of "Olive Branch" Forces. Small, large, public and private vehicles are routinely levied and excised and sometimes goes beyond, turning into confiscation and looting.not to mention the arbitrary control of "Olive Branch" operation factions of the economic resources in Afrin- came against the backdrop of the seizure of most of the olive plantations in Afrin by the factions of operation "Olive branch", and leasing them to dealers and workers to work in them and receive money in advance as a price for the lease of these seized plantations, which comprise more than 75% of the area's olive farms.

According to eye-witness accounts and the SOHR reports, militants have also raided local olive groves, where they forcibly took last year's crop and chopped down trees for firewood to be exported to Turkey.

The militants, as reported by the SOHR, appropriated Afrin vineyards and leased them to non-local investors.

Locals in Afrin have been targeted by Turkey-backed groups. Agricultural crops, such as olive, grains, fruits, sumac, grapes, are being unlawfully looted by opposition factions acting under direct orders of pro-Turkey local councils. Militias threaten Kurdish residents with death if they try to get hold of seasonal crops.

The armed factions deliberately sabotage the agricultural crops by allowing livestock to graze in the lands for Kurdish citizens, in addition to beating and insulting citizens,, in the framework of pushing them out of their areas, where the Syrian Observatory learned that members of the Samarqand and Suleiman Shah factions now force Kurdish families to provide meals for their fighters.

Today most fertile fields have been leased by warlords of the armed factions to the new settlers."Nothing is ours", say local Kurds."It is their guns versus our bare chests, we can't do anything", they lament.

### **7.A- Seizure of olive oil:**

The seizure of olive oil was, according to Turkish state media, a project "to market Afrin olives to the world" after processing them in Turkey's Hatay Province.

Last year local Afrin residents had to give the Turkey-backed FSA authorities their olive products last year, with 20 percent as "tax", plus 10 percent as surtaxes to Turkey-appointed local councils.

Yenisafak newspaper, closely-aligned with Erdogan, published a report on the 2018 olive harvest season in Afrin, valuing the total value of products at 200 million US Dollars.

Turkey's agriculture minister, Bekir Pakdemirli, was quoted in the Turkish media as saying that his government planned to claim the olive oil being produced in Afrin to stop it falling into the hands of Kurdish forces .



A Swiss MP has accused the Turkish government of passing off olive oil plundered from Afrin to be marketed in European Union countries, including Spain.

Bernhard Guhl of Switzerland's Conservative Democratic Party alerted the Swiss government to the possibility of olive oil seized as loot from the conflict in Afrin entering the European Union single market, falsely labelled as Turkish, with the aim of financing militias backed by Ankara.

"In Afrin, olive groves are being pillaged by both Turkish forces and the militias they support. The olives they steal have been sold to Spain, and the sale will continue," Mr Guhl said.

"It doesn't matter if the final destination is Spain or Germany but, I believe it is very important that the country or countries concerned launch a criminal investigation to determine whether companies are trading in stolen olives or olive oil," Mr Guhl told Spanish online Público.

According to Público, the Turkish government is using a number of intermediary companies to export olive oil seized from former Kurdish-held areas into Spain.

The newspaper quotes sources from the region claiming the oil is mixed with a Turkish product before being exported under a false label.

Público quotes a dossier on the alleged looting of olive oil from the Afrin area that states the haul from last year's crop could be worth around €70 million (£62 million) in the Spanish wholesale market, with a quarter of revenues due to be handed to FSA militias.

Besides, in Mabatli, last fall, Jaish Al-Islam had forced all Kurdish farmers to sell their olive oil product to this faction at cheap prices worth 8.000SP for each 16-kilo oil tin, at a time when it was worth 14.000SP in other areas of Afrin, and 30.000 thousand before the invasion.

### **7.B-Destruction of olive fields,orchards and forests:**

Turkish forces, seeking to displace Afrin civilians have committed pillage, exercised brute force, and cut down olive groves, which were essential to the survival of the local economy.

Approximately 11,000 hectares out of total 33,000 hectares of natural and man-made pine forests in Afrin were destroyed in what can be described as a deliberate and malicious burning of forests by Turkey-backed FSA rebels.

In the summer of 2018, forest fires were rampant without the intervention of Turkish army and armed groups to extinguish the fires.

On many cases, according to local sources, every time the locals would try to extinguish fires, that consumed large number trees of villagers, they were rebuffed, with warning shots from FSA rebels to keep off.

According to local sources, the Turkish forces and their proxies set fire to the forests of Tetra, Qusir, i Qazqli of Janders district, Midanki, Hawar mountains, Rajo, and elsewhere, in addition to an area between the villages of Kubk and Siwa of Mobata district.

The FSA rebels and Turkish soldiers also burnt the mountains of Sarsin, Kharbet Samaq, Korla, Kamrash, Surkha and Raju districts. They also set fires to nearly half of the forests of the Hawar Mountains (Bafran, Qalqat Hawar, Risha Asieh), in the mountains of the villages of Rowta (the mountains of the valley of Jahnem), Ramdana, Gorda and Mobata, Tetara, Haj Hesna, Qazqali, Sheikh Mohammed, Jolaqa and the forest in Midanki Lake.

Besides, large areas of forests and olive orchards are being uprooted and trucks loaded with wood heading for Turkey's Hatay are common scenes on highways in Afrin.

Besides, armed factions randomly cut down olive trees whose owners are displaced outside Afrin, as part of their trade in firewood. In fact local sources confirmed that burning forests in 2018 was conducted by warlords in collaboration with some Turkish army officers, where trees were sawn into logs or made into charcoal and transported to Turkey.

### **8-Religious Cleansing and Destruction of Religious sites:**

Afrin had developed a rather secular reputation. According to historian Harriet Allsopp, author of "*The Kurds of Syria*": Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East, the region had the fewest mosques nationwide and its inhabitants were typically not strict adherents to religious conventions. However, Afrin was home to vibrant Sufi networks, as well as small Yezidi, Alevi, and Christian populations. The region's



Sufis, Yezidis, and Alevi maintained shrines throughout the countryside, often the tombs of sheikhs and holy figures, which acted as the frequent locus of pilgrimages and communal celebrations.

Yezidi presence in the region dates back to at least the 13th century. There were some 35,000 Yezidis in Afrin before the invasion. Most of Afrin's 3,000 Christians are evangelical protestants who had recently converted to Christianity while Afrin's Armenians moved to Aleppo fifty years ago.

Likely the only Kurdish-speaking Alevi community in Syria, the Alevi of Afrin, arrived over the past several centuries, escaping bouts of persecution in Turkey's Kurdistan. Afrin's Alevi live within the centrally located Ma'abatli (also known as Mabata) subdistrict. The community's size is estimated to be somewhere between 10,000 thousand and 15,000.

Nearly 3,000 Christians fled and none of them dared to return because they will face certain death since they are considered apostates by Islamist extremists. More than 35,000 Yazidis throughout the region also fled their homes and farms but some of them returned, in hope that they would claim their property, only to find themselves forced to convert to Islam.

All Yazidis have had homes looted and thei Yezidi Centre was looted, desecrated to be later turned into an Islamic religious school. One Christian woman reportedly was in hiding until she was arrested to be gang-raped and killed by fighters from Suleyman Shah brigade. The Church of *the Good Shepherd* in Afrin was burned and graffitied with names of militant groups ( Jaish alSharqiyya) that now claim it and who are in fact former Isis fighters from Deir Ezzor province..

n a July 2018 Dars News report on abuses suffered by Afrini Yezidis following the conclusion of Operation Olive Branch, photos were published allegedly showing the destruction of the Yezidi cultural center and statues of the Prophet Zoroaster and the Dome of Lalish, in Afrin city.

Whenever we see this in Syria, Iraq, or elsewhere, we will later see Muslims returned to their homes, while the Christians and Yazidis are not able to go back. This is genocide.

#### **8.A- A list of some Vandalized shrines and bulldozed cemeteries:**

- 1-Islamic Shrine of Kara Jorna, Mesh'ale
- 2-Islamic Shrine of Sheikh Zaid, Afrin
- 3-Islamic Shrine of Nebi Houri, Cyrrhus
- 4-Shrine of Ali Dada and Cemetery, Sinara
- 5-Yezidi Shrine of Sheikh Junayd, Qarabash (Feqiran
- 6-Henan Cemetery and shrine, the resting place of one of David's sons, Mesh'ale
- 7-Sheikh Mohammad shrine and cemetery, Miske Jer.
- 8-Islamic Shrine of Sheikmous, Gawanda.
- 9-Yezidi Shrine of Sheikh Rukab, Shadereh.
- 10-Kefer Saфра ypg and SDF martyrs' graves(Shahid Saïdo cemetery).
- 11- Matina ypg and SDF martyrs' graves( Shahid Rafiq cemetery).
- 12-Avesta ypg cemetery in Afrin the city.

## **9-Enforcing Turkification and Arabization**

A wave of Arabization started in the Kurdish city of Afrin in northwest Syria soon after its takeover by Arab rebel groups and Turkish forces, a process that continues to this day, according to evidence on the ground and statements from international organizations, including the United Nations.

This move is amounting to a concerted campaign of "Arabization and Turkification" in the territory where Turkey "doesn't want to see any manifestation of Kurdish identity there

Enforcing Turkification and Arabisation of the Syrian north threatens peaceful coexistence in Syria and the future of Syrian Kurds specifically as Kurdish features are being systematically targeted.

Local institutions, streets and shops are being rebranded with Turkish names and the Kurdish language is being removed from academic curricula and replaced with the Arabic and Turkish languages.

The traffic roundabout formerly called "Kawa" after the legendary blacksmith and Kurdish symbol of resistance whose statue once stood there, but was destroyed by the rebels after their capture of the city.

Now, a banner in Arabic and Turkish identifies it as "Olive Branch Circle," after the name that Turkish commanders gave to their operation to occupy Afrin. Likewise all Parts of Afrin have been renamed to reflect its new authorities.

For example, inside Afrin the city one r sign reads: "President Recep Tayyip Erdogan Square."



The Turkification and Arabization process is more intense in the town of Bilbil due to its proximity to Turkey and strategic location. A source in Bilbil told Rudaw on condition of anonymity for safety reasons that 350 Arab families had been settled there and only 10 Kurdish families have remained in the town

### **9.A-Civil records and identity cards**

The Civil records departments in Afrin and the northern countryside of Aleppo are interconnected with the provinces of Hatay, Kilis and Gaziantep in the south of Turkey. These districts require the population in most areas of the northern countryside of Aleppo to get identity cards which integrate the data of the ID holders in the Turkish civil records system.

### **9.B- Erasing the cultural identity of the region**

Schools now enforce gender segregation, Turkish flags fly over public buildings and portraits of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hang in shops.

Turkish flags and pictures of Erdogan were also draped over school buildings and in public spaces.

School students are forced to carry Turkish flags and children are forced to appear in videos thanking Erdogan.

Turkey has also started claiming cultural and historical links to the Syrian north.

Activists have accused Turkey of carrying out a "Turkification" policy in Afrin in particular, eliminating any symbolism linked to the Kurds or the Kurdish-led groups in Syria.

After capturing the area, Turkish-backed rebels changed names of streets and squares, stripping them of references to Kurdish culture.

Symbols of grey wolf at schools and elsewhere.

Turkey also plans to renovate and turn into a museum a house in the Afrin area that it says was used by the founder of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Ataturk, during the First World War.

### **9.C-Few examples of places whose names have been Turkified:**

The Kawa al-Haddad roundabout (in the city of Afrin) has become known as the Olive Branch roundabout. Nowrouz roundabout (in the city of Afrin) has become known as the roundabout of Salah ad-Din al-Ayoubi. The square of the Saraya building (in the city of Afrin) has become known as Recep Tayyip Erdogan Square. The village of Kastal Mekdad (located in Bulbul town in the countryside of Afrin) has become known as Souuldjouk Obasi.

The village of Kotan (located in Bulbul town in the countryside of Afrin) has become known as Zafer Obasi.

The village of Karzila (located in Bulbul town in the countryside of Afrin) has become known as Saghir Obasi.

### **9.D-Turkish flag printed on school score records**

The Turkish language has been included in elementary, intermediate and secondary levels' curricula but the Kurdish language was removed.

The dominance of the Turkish culture was evident in the educational process, as the educational offices in Afrin printed both the Turkish and the revolution flags on the covers of the school score records.

### **9.E- Banning Kurdish New Year's Day festivities**

Last spring, though, as the Aleppo provincial city of Afrin marked one year under Turkish proxy control, a very different scene was on display—decorations and signs of the Noroz holiday were nowhere to be found, according to local residents. And while some went quietly about their daily business, an eerie silence hung over the streets outside.

Just days before widespread festivities were slated to begin, a series of public announcements circulated throughout Turkish-controlled areas of northwestern Syria, purportedly signed by representatives of the Afrin Local Council, appeared to forbid any public symbols of the Kurdish holiday.

According to local news reports, a Turkish-backed faction arrested a number of civilians in the village of Kafr Safra on the evening of March 20, as they tried to carry the traditional torch of Nowruz through the village center.

## **10-Imami Hatib schools**



On Jan. 29, the official Anadolu news agency reported that the governor of southern Hatay Province paid a visit to a kind of Turkish Islamic high school, known as an "Imam Hatip" school, to meet with "Syrian" teachers receiving training before Turkey appointed them to schools in the Kurdish region of Afrin, just across the border into Syria.

Turkey had launched the Islamic high school "Imam Hatip" in Afrin, state-funded Anadolu Agency reported in January, in addition to other schools offering courses in Turkish and Arabic. Even inside Turkey itself, Turkish opposition parties and the secular elite accuse Imam Hatip schools of being facade for fundamentalism and hotbeds for nestling Islamist terrorism. Anadolu wrote that the teachers at the religious school are tasked with teaching in the Turkish language once they are sent to Afrin.

Another report dated Jan. 17 exposed that Turkey had opened at least one Imam Hatip school in Afrin that was providing Islamic education in Turkish and Arabic.

A top director from the Turkish Ministry of National Education was photographed handing out school reports to hijab-donning teenage students at a ceremony for the winter break.

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*Sabah*, a staunchly pro-government newspaper, reported on Jan. 18, that Ankara had also appointed five muftis and 299 clerical staff from Diyanet to the mosques it was building or repairing in Afrin.

According to a report by Sky News Arabic Turkey is planning to open 120 Islamic schools in Afrin and its countryside.

In fact, Imami Hatip courses are now obligatory for all students at different schools of Afrin.

A new report by "The Organization of Afrin Human Rights" has unveiled efforts made by Turkish state in using Islamic religion as a tool to further implement Turkification in different regions of the Kurdish enclave of Afrin currently under the sway of Turkish forces and pro-Turkey Syrian opposition rebels.

According to Turkish media a delegation from Turkish Islamic Endowment/ministry of Islamic religion/, representing Turkish president, led by Dean of the University of Zahraa in Antep, Turkey Dr. Mostafa Moslem visited the city of Afrin late June this year. The visiting delegation met with members of pro-Turkey local councils and notables of the region. Mostafa Moslem also delivered Friday sermon at a mosque in Afrin. Besides, the delegation discussed with Turkey-backed local officials the best ways to bolster religious learning in Afrin and how to dedicate Islamic institutions to popularize the very concepts that uphold Turkish policies.

## 11-Wall of Annexation

### Turkey's Wall around Afrin Hints Ambitions of Annexing the area

Turkey is working to erect a wall around Syria's northern city of Afrin to separate it from its surroundings, as part of a larger scheme to build a border wall. Kurds in the area have warned that such a move suggests Turkey is moving towards annexing Afrin.

With the intent to isolate Afrin from its natural geographic environment, as an integral part of Syrian territory, Turkey is constructing this "wall of annexation" which is considered a blatant violation of International law. They plan to build a 70 km wall inside Syrian territory, with oversight towers that are in direct contact with the military command centres of Turkish forces in adjacent Idlib.

The wall is made of cement blocks that are three metres high, and the part that has been completed is more than three kilometres.

Political analysts stress that the wall is being built under coverage provided by Syrian opposition parties, namely the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), an amalgamation of opposition groups that are active in Syria's north and headquartered in Istanbul.

Five years ago, the Turkish government announced plans for building a security wall along its border with Syria. Ankara has so far completed the construction of 564 km. After wrapping up the part of the structure in Afrin, the wall will reach 711 km.

## 12-Vandalizing The Ancient History of the Region

### Destruction of the cultural heritage of the region and desecration of holy places

The ASOR, (American Schools of Oriental Research) Cultural Heritage Initiatives, published a report on the incident, detailing the destruction, damaging and looting of the cultural heritage of Afrin by Turkish army and its proxies.

During the Turkish invasion, warplanes carried out several raids since on 3 archeological sites located in open places away from military positions: Deir Meshmesh Byzantine ancient site in the south-east of Afrin, Al-Nabi Hori site in the north-east of Afrin, and Ein Dara archeological site in the south of Afrin.

These deliberate strikes, which were documented and videoded by CNN, the Guardian, the Independent and other top-rated global news outlets, resulted in substantial damage to both Deir Meshmesh and Al-Nabi Hori locations, and the destruction of half of Ein Dara site and its sculptures.



On March 18, 2018 the capture of Afrin city by Turkish-backed forces culminated in the symbolic destruction of the Kawa statue which depicted a hero from Kurdish (and Persianic) folklore, who, to millions, symbolizes liberation from tyranny.

The temple at Ain Dara in northern Syria was severely damaged in an airstrike by Turkish warplanes and CNN covered the incident releasing a drone- taken video of the site.

Much of the magnificent 3,000-year-old temple of Ain Dara, with its mysterious and massive footprints, huge basalt lions and a structure that provides clues for understanding the biblical temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, has been destroyed in a Turkish airstrike.

The temple, one of the largest and most extensively ancient excavated structures in Syria, is famous for its intricate stone sculptures of lions and sphinxes, and for its similarities to Solomon's Temple—the first Jewish temple in Jerusalem, said to have held the Ark of the Covenant.

"There is credible evidence that pro-Turkey armed factions are erasing the area's history, through excavating for artifacts in ancient sites and mounds under the nose of Turkish forces." Director of Syrian Observatory for Human rights said.

In fact, videos captured in the area show whole sites being bulldozed in search of antiquities and valuable archeological pieces.

SOHR also monitored that armed members of the pro-Turkey Turkmenli faction "Sultan Murad", are digging and drifting soil in Bulbul Township in Afrin countryside in the north-east of Aleppo, carrying out excavations through digging and drifting the soil on the ancient mound, using heavy excavators and bulldozers, in addition to the uprooting of olive trees before the very eyes of Turkish forces in the area.

Reliable sources in the southwestern countryside of Afrin confirmed that Turkish vehicles, equipment, and devices were seen on the Mound of Jandairis as specialist Turkish teams dug in, searching for buried stuff and antiques. During the process, all roads leading to the site were completely closed by the Turkish Forces, and the Syrian Observatory monitored by videos and images the machines used in excavations in Jandairis Hill area.

BBC reported on 2May,2019 that facebook is being used by networks of traffickers located in Turkey to buy and sell looted antiquities

"These private private groups also discuss how to illegally excavate ancient tombs, according to research by academics," the BBC reported.

Facebook said it had removed 49 of these groups following the BBC's investigation.

The BBC also saw evidence that antiquities were still being smuggled from Iraq and Syria into Turkey, despite the fall of Islamic State.

Credible sources told the Syrian Observatory that a leader in al-Shami Islamic Corps close to the Turkish authorities, the 1st legion of the National Army, led by the Renegade Colonel defected from the regime forces, Moataz Reslan, deliberately stole antiquities from al-Nabi Hori Castle area.

This barbaric hunting for treasures commenced with using primitive methods of digging and excavation, as antiques were looted and transported to Turkey. However, over the days, and as the number of diggers and searcher for these antiques increased, the methods of digging and searching for these antiques evolved to using modern drilling equipment, and sophisticated metal detection devices. In fact, it is not Turkey's inability to stop these encroachments, but rather a systematic campaign by Turkish authorities to ,first, deface and erase the history of the area and, second, for Turkish officers to gain millions of dollars as profits, being real partners in looting and plunder.

### **13-The plight of Kurdish refugees in Shahba**

Displaced people who fled to Shehba, live in makeshift refugee camps which were set up with the limited resources available there.

Shehba is a small region north of Aleppo, surrounded by Syrian government forces on one side and Turkish-backed rebels on the other. Liberated from ISIS in 2016, its infrastructure is still devastated, and mines left by ISIS still pose a danger to civilians.



The war-torn townships and villages of Shehba were in a deplorable state; the infrastructure was almost in ruins and shambles; landmines and cluster bombs were strewn everywhere. So, reconstruction, clearance of mines and debris had to be undertaken to protect local civilians and deportees alike. Accordingly, large numbers of workers and managers were required to provide aid and services to cater to the pressing needs of the adventitious deportees. Therefore, new emergency committees encompassing qualified people from the displaced ones themselves were appointed embracing work mechanisms and cadres of former municipalities of Afrin, and their expertise.

Thus, on 20 March, 2018, Berxwedan Camp was quite precipitately pitched on the spur of the moment in the vicinity of the town of Fafin. Then, another camp was pitched in Tel Susin, Serdem Camp ( Common Era ) while a special camp, Kojar Camp was built for the Nomads, at their own request ,so that they would preserve their own singularities. The newest camp is 'The Camp of Returning Home', in Zarate, Sherawa.

Approximately, 140,000, refugees are residing in decrepit houses in different formerly depopulated towns and villages across Shahbaa Regions.

Many of those who fled Afrin are now sleeping in tent cities and war-torn Shahba villages, lacking the most elementary necessities.

Many vulnerable refugees who have exhausted all savings to keep alive over the past 18 months of displacement as they had to make choices between food, fuel or winter clothes for their children and themselves. Some of them have reached the far end of despair.

**Psychosocial and environmental factors seriously aggravate the situation, especially for children at tent schools in camps and other war-ravaged school buildings which are either partly-destroyed or bears the scars of brutal fighting.** Afrin children witnessed the horrors of invasion in Afrin like the destruction of their homes, death of parents and siblings, neighbors and friends. Since children still suffer the psychosocial traumas of war, parents report symptoms of deep distress, and fear including sleep disturbances, crying, bed wetting, anxiety, social withdrawal and phobia. Moreover, HSK records show an increase in suicide cases among young women due to depression, despair and hardships of life in camps and other refugee concentrations.

## 14-Messages to the West

Regretfully, in whichever state they live, the Kurds endure a perilous existence and world powers only see them useful proxies when needed – and friends to forget when not. Kurds often say they have “no friends but the mountains.”

However, even the mountains couldn't protect them against Turkish warplanes in Afrin.

The Turkish attack on Afrin was entirely unprovoked. In fact, Afrin was so peaceful for most of the Syrian war that it became a safe haven for tens of thousands of refugees—some of whom are now refugees for a second time. In the cantons they controlled, the Kurdish-led forces had established an oasis, unique in Syria, of local self-government, women's rights, and secular rule. Yet the Turkish government cynically claims that it is threatened by Rojava because the people leading it—who have been the US's leading allies in the fight against ISIS in Syria—are “terrorists.”

Today, the US should think twice about any force that Turkey would offer it for the creation of “the Safe Zone” in northeastern Syria. Erdogan claims that millions of Syrians would return if Turkey took control east of the Euphrates. This means that Turkey wants to repeat the Afrin model in the east of the Euphrates. Syria's Kurds distrust Erdogan's assertion in the New York Times that he wants to help them, and fear a Turkish incursion more than one by the Syrian regime.

While the attack on Afrin is a violation of international law comparable to those of the Assad government, the Trump administration has made only feeble protests against Recep Tayyip Erdogan's depredations. By accepting Turkey's attack, the US will become complicit in Erdogan's ethnic cleansing plan to expel the Kurds once and for all from their historic lands where they have lived for centuries, and to eradicate the democratic experiment developing in Rojava.

Encouraged by the lack of response from the US, Erdogan is threatening to take his military campaign deeper into Syria, to Manbij and Kobane and Jazira.. It is clear that this campaign is already benefiting ISIS, alQaeida,, the Iranians and other Islamist ultracons in multiple ways.

To stop this madness, Turkey must be isolated economically, diplomatically, and militarily until it withdraws its troops and its proxy militias from Kurdish Syria. In the long run, there can be no peace in the region until Turkey is willing to reopen negotiations with its own Kurds and grant all its citizens democratic rights, including freedom of expression and the right to form political parties and win elections without reprisals.



In a nutshell, the US should not sell its SDF allies to bloodthirsty Erdogan who is threatening to "bury the Kurdish forces in their trenches."

Basically, Erdogan threats are part of efforts made by Russia and Iran to drive the US out of Syria, and incoming reports from Deir Ezzor speak of Iranian Revolutionary Guard and their proxies making final preparations for an onslaught on US and its allies in the region once Turkey launches its incursion.

The repercussions of any betrayal of US Kurdish allies to Turkey will continue to echo throughout U.S. foreign policy. The serious damage to The US credibility, damage compounded by false claims of victory and decisions made at the behest of authoritarian regimes like Erdogan's Turkey, will affect U.S. efforts elsewhere and for years to come.

Ultimately, the fall of Afrin did offer a particularly gloomy snapshot of Washington's confused role in the Syrian war, we hope that the US will not commit the same mistake in Eastern Syria, but it would rather curb this monster called Erdogan.

#### **We call on the Free World to:**

- impose economic and political sanctions on Turkey's leadership.
- embargo sales and delivery of weapons from NATO countries to Turkey.
- insist upon Rojava's representation in Syrian peace negotiations.
- continue military support for the SDF.

Ultimately, it is time to recognize that no solution to the region's problems can be worth its salt without the active participation of the Kurdish people and the other minorities that make up the historical map of the area and that the Rojavan Revolution now seeks to give a voice to.

US engagement is critical. If the US does not defend the Kurds, and ultimately create conditions for their return to homes in Afrin, Northern Syria will become a bloodbath for which the US will share responsibility.

Deterring Turkey's future aggression is also an urgent priority, given Erdogan's threat to expand operations in order to systematically continue to change the demographic composition of Kurdish territories to the east of the Euphrates.

#### **15- Why Turkish State should be prosecuted for war crimes perpetrated in Afrin:**

Amnesty International said in its last year's report about human rights abuses in Afrin that "Turkey is the occupying power in Afrin, and therefore is responsible for the welfare of the civilian population and maintaining law and order. So far, its armed forces have failed utterly in these duties. It cannot evade responsibility by using Syrian armed groups to carry out its dirty work. Without further delay, Turkey must end violations by pro-Turkish armed groups, hold perpetrators accountable, and commit to helping Afrin residents rebuild their lives."

Types of war crimes committed by Turkish army and its affiliated Syrian rebels:

- Targeting groups in violation of Article 7 of the 1998 Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court.
- Issuing summary judgments leading to execution or disappearance.
- Committing torture and murder, booty and plunder.
- Killing of prisoners of war and mutilating bodies of dead Kurdish fighters.
- Violating women's rights, through kidnapping and abuse.
- Abducting children and taking hostages.
- Burning books, documents and historical artifacts.
- Destruction of sacred places, such as religious shrines, cemeteries, temples, the historical sites and levelling cemeteries using bulldozers.
- The destruction of the Yazidi Union Center as well as the Allawi centre. Journalists and medical workers were targeted.
- Arbitrary Detentions and Confiscation of property, homes, and shops
- Occupation of children's schools
- Extortion (via ransom following Kidnapping)

What Amnesty's investigation alleges:

What Amnesty International investigations concluded to is that:

- 1-Residents in Afrin are enduring "arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, confiscation of property and looting."
  - 2-Most of the abuses were "at the hands of Syrian groups that have been equipped and armed by Turkey."
  - 3-Some of the rebel groups and Turkish armed forces had "taken over schools, disrupting the education for thousands of children."
  - 4-Afrin University was "completely shut down after it was destroyed and looted," according to residents cited by Amnesty.
  - 5-Civilians have been punished or had their property seized on "baseless accusations of affiliation to the YPG."
- All these actions violate international human rights and humanitarian law.

Victims demand justice. In fact, victims have a right to justice, according to the Geneva Conventions and principles of the Rome Statute. They also have the right to "Truth," a full accounting of Turkey's crimes.

The international community should set-up a commission of inquiry to gather facts and recommend a criminal investigation. The commission's work would address events over a specific period of time and geographic area.



The perpetrators, including the Turkish state and its proxies, should be identified and held accountable, including those with command responsibility.

Turkish forces and their jihadi proxies committed genocide and crimes against humanity, as defined by the Geneva Convention (12 August 1949). It conducted indiscriminate bombing of civilian settlements, massacring members of an ethnic, denomination and belief group. It violated the Geneva Convention of 12 January 1951, which makes collective punishment a crime (Article 1) and criminalizes violence against national, denominational and religious communities (Article 2).

## **16-Conclusion:**

*The consequences of Erdogan's war on "terror" in Afrin were villages in ruins and the life of civilians turned into debris. Men, women and children have been killed or severely wounded. The survivors are exposed to violence, humiliation, sexual harassment, or extrajudicial killing due to their ethnicity or religion. On top of this, civilian homes have been seized by Turkish-backed jihadists, farms have been destroyed, cattle killed or stolen. Moreover, the lives of tens of thousands of displaced Afrinians have turned into hell in diaspora.*

*This is just a glimpse of what Erdogan claimed as a war to bring peace to Afrin's people. The immoral refugee deal between Turkey and the European Union, the political agendas of EU, US and Russia all strengthen Erdogan's high hand. Ironically, today Turkish official are vowing day and night to bury the same people who sacrificed their lives fighting against the "common evil", ISIS, in their trenches to the East of the Euphrates.*

*However, it seems that Afrin was just the tip of the iceberg of Erdogan's bloody adventures. Today, Erdogan and his henchmen are sending incendiary warnings to the United States of America that the Turkish army is ready to unleash hell in the US-SDF Eastern Euphrates, except this time, world powers, save Putin, are not firmly on the side of the aggressors.*

*In Afrin, in a bizarre twist, those aggressors managed to convince key world leaders and public opinion-makers that Kobane's defenders were "terrorists" because they embraced a radical version of ecology, democracy and women's rights.*

*We hope that history will not repeat itself and as the US and Erdogan are fully engaged in the creation of the so-called safe zones, the US should bear in mind that Erdogan is, first and foremost, an active member of the Evil Trio, or the axis of evil, Iran, Russia and Turkey.*

*The End*

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## Human Rights Organization in Jazira and Afrin.



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