



A main square in Afrin, which has been renamed "the Recep Tayyip Erdogan Square" after the Turkish Army and allied Syrian opposition groups took over the Kurdish city of Afrin, with the aim of obliterating its Kurdish identity.

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September 20, 2019

Call for action regarding the situation in the Afrin district in the Syrian Arab Republic offered to the parties present at the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly 2019, New York.

*Serious concerns among indigenous and displaced populations over the preservation of their origins*

[Syrians for Truth and Justice](#)-STJ presents this paper to the UNGA in order to highlight the situation in the Afrin district, a Kurdish majority area fully part of Syria. We urge the international community to actively engage with the issues of the Afrin district, i.g. the violations under international law, and implement adequate practices dealing with these concerns within their procedures for addressing issues in Syria.

Since January 2018 the Olive Branch military operation against the People's Protection Units (YPG) led to the occupation of the Afrin district by Turkey and its allied forces. The military operations have been conducted by Turkish forces and the Turkish backed Free Syrian Army, among others.<sup>1</sup> The consequences of these operations are severe and include grave violations of international law.

Over the last three months already, the number of arbitrary arrests increased from 56 in June, to 63 in July and at least 80 cases in August.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, there is a growing threat of identity eradication of the native residents, including those who have been internally displaced. The new civil registry mechanism implemented in Afrin, designed by the Turkish government, does not make any distinctions between internally displaced persons and local citizens in terms of geographic origin, thereby disregarding the pasts and origins of many people. Furthermore, the new registry does not incorporate previous ID information, leaving official evidence of origin of citizens in a single hardcopy file, vulnerable to being destroyed or disappearance.

Finally, actors have perpetrated violations against historical, cultural and religious sites. Thus, the historic Shrine 'Ali Dada' in Afrin has been destroyed during the military operations. More recent visual evidence shows how the cemetery was bulldozed by the military vehicles of the Turkish and allied forces.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty has indicated that Turkey is present in Afrin as an occupying force, pointing out to names of armed groups accused of committing grave violations of human rights, including Ferqa/Division 55, Jabha al-Shamiye/Levant Front, Faylaq al-Sham/al-Sham Legion, Sultan Mourad, and Ahrar al-Sharqiye. "Syria: Turkey must stop serious violations by allied groups and its own forces in Afrin," Amnesty International. August 2, 2018. Last visited: Sept 18, 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, please refer to the following public sources: [https://stj-sy.org/en/63-arrests-in-afrin-during-july-2019/#\\_ftnref3](https://stj-sy.org/en/63-arrests-in-afrin-during-july-2019/#_ftnref3) <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-at-least-80-people-arrested-in-afrin-during-august-2019/>. <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-at-least-13-kidnappings-recorded-recently-in-afrin/>.

<sup>3</sup> For further information, please refer to "Syria: New visual evidence of bulldozing the Ali Dada Historic Shrine in Afrin, 10 September. Last visited: 18 September, 2019 <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-new-visual-evidence-of-bulldozing-the-ali-dada-historic-shrine-in-afrin/>; Afrin: Incidents Of Desecration And Destruction Of Cultural Sites, 11 July 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2019/07/11/afrin-incidents-of-desecration-and-destruction-of-cultural-sites/>.

To add to the above mentioned data, we would like to refer to a conclusion of the latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, where the commission highlights in para.66 that “there are reasonable grounds to believe that members of armed groups in Afrin continued to commit war crimes<sup>4</sup>”. Furthermore, we highlight the importance of considering the previous mentioned data in light of a military occupation by Turkish forces, implying obligations under international law.

## Recommendations

In light of the above demonstrated data, and in order to ensure documentation of the unlawful acts within the Afrin district comprehensively for future transitional justice mechanisms to be effective, we recommend the following to the International community:

- 1. To address the issue of the Afrin district as part of the UNGA agenda for dealing with the issues of the Syrian conflict, especially when taking into account the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, who “noted with grave concern the recent spike in hostilities throughout north-western Syria, warning any further escalation would invariably result in a humanitarian and human rights catastrophe”.**
- 2. To urge Turkey and armed opposition groups to abide by international standards and refrain from conducting arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and torture, preserve cultural heritage, respect indigenous identities and take all feasible measures to prevent demographic changes in the area.**
- 3. To encourage the IIM, the OHCHR, the CoI the UNHCR to investigate the civil registry mechanism implemented in the Afrin district and Euphrates Shield perimeter.**

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<sup>4</sup> A/HRC/42/51 “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquire on the Syrian Arab Republic, Advanced edited version, August 15 2019. Paras. 69-61 and para.62.