



October 18, 2019



© Ivan Hassib

Regional Organizations Condemn Turkey's Ethnic Cleansing Plan for Northeast Syria

Regional Organizations Condemn Turkey's Ethnic Cleansing Plan for Northeast Syria

We, a group of human rights organizations from the Middle East and North Africa, express our grave concern regarding Turkey's [military operation](#) in northeastern Syria and its plan to resettle Syrian refugees in the area, following US President Donald Trump's [decision](#) to withdraw U.S. troops from the area. This act of aggression will lead to serious human rights violations and further destabilize the region. The military incursion has already resulted in [218](#) civilian deaths, and there are reports that key civilian [infrastructure](#) has been targeted, including water pumping stations, dams, power stations, and oil fields.

Accordingly, an additional [150,000 to 160,000](#) Syrians have been displaced by the violence so far. While we welcome the announcement of Turkey's temporary suspension of its military operation, reports from Syria suggest that [fighting](#) continues on the border. To this end, we stress the need for an effective agreement that enforces any ceasefire on the ground and the full withdrawal of Turkey's forces from the area while also ensuring the protection of civilians and preventing any attempts at demographic change as a means to solve the security concerns of the parties to the conflict.

Over the last eight years, the Syrian people have suffered greatly at the hands of all parties to the conflict, most grievously from the violent repression and brutal assaults carried out by the Syrian government under President Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian civil war has created 5.6 million [refugees](#) and internally displaced an additional 6.6 million people. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has announced his [plan](#) to create a so-called "safe zone" in northeastern Syria and forcibly transfer up to 2 million Syrian [refugees](#) into the area.

This will only exacerbate the conflict and result in further casualties and displacement of the local population, which is made up of Kurds, Arabs, and Assyrians. This further militarization of the conflict has already led to escalation with the Syrian army entering the northeast to confront the Turkish military, following an [agreement](#) between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian government. This is the latest step in the ongoing pressure by the Turkish government against its 3.6 million Syrian refugees, which has included [shutting](#) down refugee camps and forcibly [returning](#) Syrian refugees to a [war zone](#), in violation of its obligations under international refugee law.

We are concerned that the Turkish government's plans to resettle Syrian refugees from different parts of the country in territory cleared by the military incursion will result in enforced demographic change and further conflict, endangering both returning refugees and the local population. This operation has troubling similarities to Turkey's Operation Olive Branch in northwest Syria in and around the city of Afrin, which resulted in serious human rights violations and demographic change. Approximately [137,000](#) Syrians were displaced from Afrin as part of Turkey's plans to reduce the Kurdish majority in the area.

The Turkish government [transferred](#) Syrian Arabs to Afrin and into the homes of Kurds who fled. The Turkish military and its allies also damaged and [destroyed](#) the historical, cultural, and religious sites of the indigenous communities in the area.

Moreover, Afrin's residents suffer ongoing [violations](#) at the hands of Turkish backed armed groups, including [intimidation](#), arbitrary detention, kidnapping, torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, confiscation of property and homes, and looting. According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [civilians](#) have been detained by these groups and accused of affiliation with specific Kurdish armed or political groups, and the whereabouts of many of these civilians remains unknown. Turkey, as the occupying power, bears the responsibility for these abuses and violations committed by its allies.

In this context, we recommend the following:

- We request the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to investigate the human rights situation in northeast Syria and report their findings to the UN Human Rights Council
- We call on state and non-state actors to share any and all evidence of serious crimes committed in northern Syria with the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) and for the international community to ensure accountability through relevant criminal proceedings for any crimes committed.
- We further call for an immediate end to Turkey's military operations in northeastern Syria, which poses a threat to international peace and security.
- We urge the international community to pressure Turkey to end its military operations and withdraw from the area.
- Turkey must comply with international law and prioritize protection of civilians and cease attacking civilian infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the population, such as water facilities.
- The Turkish government must meet its international obligations and ensure that refugees are protected and refrain from returning anyone to a place where they have a well-founded fear of persecution, torture, or loss of life.
- The European Union should ensure that none of its funding to Turkey under the EU-Turkey refugees agreement is used to forcibly repatriate Syrian refugees.
- Turkey and its allied groups must abide by international humanitarian and human rights law and cease the confiscation of property, pillaging, arbitrary arrests, and the destruction of cultural property.

Signatory Organizations

1. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
2. Dawlaty
3. Ezdina Foundation
4. Palestinian Human Rights Organization (PHRO)
5. SCM | Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
6. Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC)
7. Syrians for Truth and Justice – STJ
8. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
9. The Independent Organization for Human Rights
10. The Syria Campaign
11. Urnammu



History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

-
- 🌐 www.stj-sy.org
 - 📘 [syriaSTJ](https://www.facebook.com/syriaSTJ)
 - 🐦 [@STJ_SYRIA_ENG](https://twitter.com/STJ_SYRIA_ENG)
 - 📷 [Syrians for Truth & Justice](https://www.instagram.com/Syrians%20for%20Truth%20%26amp;%20Justice)
 - ✉ editor@stj-sy.org