

Is this a picture
of illegal
construction in
Afrin?



Housing Images Falsely Circulated to be of Illegal Construction in Syria's Afrin

Image analysis and verification revealed that the housing shown is the Orange Jaffa village constructed to accommodate IDPs in Sarmada town

On 31 January 2022, public and personal Facebook and Twitter accounts, mostly Kurdish, circulated alleged news on a Palestinian organization building villages for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Syria's Kurdish-majority city of Afrin, occupied by Turkey and its allied Syrian National Army (SNA).

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) tracked the posts reporting this news and found that they all tagged the Human Rights Organization -Afrin - Syria as a source.

STJ also detected that this news was spread following a Facebook post, dated 29 January 2022, by the chairman of the southern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, Hamed Abu Daabas, declaring the completion of 600 housing units in northern Syria – without specifying the area – funded by a fundraiser launched by the Igatha 48 Organization.¹

Since the Human Rights Organization -Afrin - Syria was tagged as a source in all the posts reporting the news, we searched the Organization's official social media accounts; however, we did not find a post citing the building of new housing units in Afrin. Consequently, we suggest that the post may have been deleted or the news incorrectly attributed the organization.

¹ The Igatha 48 Organization [presents](#) itself as an international humanitarian relief organization based in the Palestinian territories in Israel and operates in the Palestinian territories, Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and abroad.

STJ's open source investigator [analyzed](#) the published images and located the coordinates of the village shown. Afterwards, our open source investigator matched the published ground images of the village to satellite images on the detected GPS coordinates and concluded that the [village](#) is the Orange Jaffa village (as named by the Igatha 48 Organization), and is located near [Babisqa](#) village in Sarmada region, north of Idlib province – not in Afrin.

Conclusion

Northern Syria, including Afrin, has witnessed large-scale construction of housing by several international and local organizations. Consequently, the post by the chairman of the Islamic Movement was confusing. Posts speaking to new housing units frequently cite the location of the village and the donor – the posts about the alleged new housing units in Afrin contained neither piece of information. Through STJ's investigation, our researchers identified the following facts about the new housing units shown in the circulated images:

- Located on the Idlib-Aleppo border, overlooking the town of Sarmada.
- Funded by a fundraising campaign organized by the Igatha 48 Organization in 2021 by Israeli Arab citizens (also referred to as Palestinians of the “dakhel,” or inside the Green Line).
- Constructed under the supervision of the Turkish Organization Tariq al-Haya/Hayat Yolu Derneği”, which operates in Syria.
- The village plan has 600 housing units, 100 of which were completed in September 2021.
- Became ready for habitation in late January 2022.

Precedents of illegal construction of housing and settlements in occupied Syrian areas

In a [report](#) released on 6 May 2021, the [Syria Justice and Accountability Center](#) expressed its raised concerns about the prospect of forced demographic change in the country and the role of foreign aid in facilitating this process. The report specifically focuses on the role of Kuwait and other regional governments in financing Turkish-led reconstruction efforts on land in Afrin belonging to displaced Kurdish populations.

The [Center](#) also confirmed through its report that these foreign-funded housing projects are desperately needed to meet the humanitarian needs of IDPS currently residing in the area, but the manner of their implementation means that they are also contributing to processes of demographic change that many have seen as the explicit intent of Turkey and its proxies. The report viewed that by funding the construction of settlements that hinder the return of the original residents displaced by Turkish-backed forces, foreign donors may be complicit in the forced transfer of populations – a crime against humanity under international criminal law.



Image (1)- A Facebook photo post claims to show a new settlement constructed in Afrin by Turkey in the context of its demographic change plan.



Image (2)- A Facebook photo post claims the Orange Jaffa village located in Afrin. The post tagged the Human Rights Organization -Afrin –Syria as a source, but STJ did not find a related post on the Organization's accounts on social media.



Image (3)- Linking the ground image of the Orange Jaffa village in rural Idlib with a satellite image of a site located on the same GPS coordinates (36°09'22.0"N 36°45'07.8"E).



About Syrians for Truth and Justice - STJ

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.

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