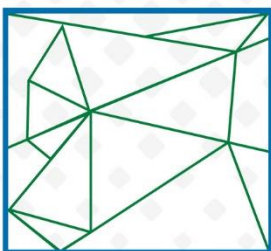


Afrin: A Kuwaiti Funded School Built on the Ruins of the Yazidi Cultural Union



Afrin: A Kuwaiti Funded School Built on the Ruins of the Yazidi Cultural Union

*Afrin's local council accepted a request by the White Hands
Association, the executive arm of the Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri
Charity Society, to construct Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb school*

On 29 June 2020, Afrin's local council, operating under the Syrian Interim Government, announced it was [laying the foundation stones](#) for a new school on the ruins of the Yazidi Cultural Union, under the name "Afrin", which was later changed to "Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb". The Yazidi Cultural Union, located in Afrin, was demolished along with the monument of Lalişa Nûranî and a statue of Zoroaster, who are Yazidi symbols. The council stated that the Kuwaiti Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri Charity Society is funding the new school project and the White Hands Association (Kurdish: Beyaz Eller Derneği) is responsible for its implementation and management.

The Yazidi Cultural Union

Building and Land Ownership

Before the onset of the Syrian war, the historic building, located in [Velat Street](#), was a headquarters of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. However, in October 2013, following the control of the People's Protection Units (YPJ) over all Afrin, the building became the base of the Yazidi Cultural Union, which was established at that time.

In 2018, Turkey took over Afrin through Operation Olive Branch, which it launched against the YPJ with support from the SNA. On 2 August 2018, [Amnesty International](#) released a report in which it described the Turkish presence in Afrin as an occupation, testifying to the violations committed by pro-Turkish groups and the Turkish forces themselves.



Image (1) – The headquarters of the Yazidi Cultural Union in Afrin. Credit: [Thomas Schmidinger](#).

The Destruction of the Yazidi Cultural Union

In 2018, Turkey took over Afrin through Operation Olive Branch, which it launched against the YPJ with support from the SNA. In the context of hostilities, the 1st and 2nd Corps of the SNA blew up the Yazidi Cultural Union and destroyed the Lalişa Nûranî monument and the Zoroaster statue.

After the demolition of the building, the place remained unchanged until 29 June 2020, when Afrin's local council, operating under the Syrian Interim Government, announced it was [laying the foundation stones](#) for a new school on the ruins of the Yazidi Cultural Union, under the name "Afrin", which was later changed to "Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb".

We should note that some media outlets reported that the building was hammered by an air strike. However, sources within the SNA confirmed to STJ that the building was deliberately blown up by members of the SNA. The sources did not reveal the reason, but it may be the presence of Yazidi/Kurdish symbols in it.



Image (2) – The headquarters of the Yazidi Cultural Union after it was destroyed. Source: [ANF News](#).



Image (3) and Image (4) – Satellite images showing the Yazidi Cultural Union before and after it was destroyed.

The Construction of Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb School

STJ spoke to a source from within Afrin's local council, who confirmed that the latter seized the land that was occupied by the Yazidis Cultural Union citing it is a state property. The source explained:

"Organizations active in Afrin, in coordination with the local council, usually carries out surveying operations to find unoccupied land and buildings in order to set up projects in them, if possible. This is what happened in the case of Al-Imam and Al-Khateeb School. The [White Hands Association/Beyaz Eller Derneği](#) informed us of its willingness to build a school on this land, since it was unoccupied and we handed it over to them under a contract No. 60706 that was signed on 10 May 2020."

The contract was signed between Afrin's local council on the one hand and the White Hands Association/Beyaz Eller Derneği and the Kuwaiti Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri Charity Society on the other. The school was [opened](#) on 23 September 2021 to start its first school year 2021-2022. According to the local council's announcement, the school has 29 equipped class and administration rooms and it only requires nominal fees for enrollment.

STJ learned from credible sources that those leading the project chose "Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb" as a name for the new school because it is similar to the name of religious schools owned by the Turkish Islamic Waqf. The purpose of this was to access to facilities usually given to the Waqf institutions in the Syrian areas occupied by Turkey.

The "Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb" School is teaching an Arabic curricula, which includes three subjects on the Islamic Sharia, imposed by the Syrian Interim Government. The curricula also includes a Turkish compulsory subject and a Kurdish optional subject for the Kurdish students in all grade levels.



Image (5)– An image of the construction of the school on the ruins of the Yazidi Cultural Union building. Credit: White Hands Association website.



Image (6) – Digital analysis of the image linking pictures after the destruction to the beginning of the construction of the school. Credit: ANF News.



Image (7) – The opening ceremony of the Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb School on the ruins of the Yazidi Cultural Union. Credit: Afrin City Local Council.



Image (8) – The opening ceremony of the Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb School on the ruins of the Yazidi Cultural Union. Credit: Afrin City Local Council.

The Religious and Cultural Significance of the Yazidi Cultural Union

Since its establishment in 2013, the Yazidi Cultural Union became a base of several committees that were working to serve the Yazidi community in civil and religious areas. These committees included the Religious Training Committee, the Elders Committee, the Women's Committee, the Youth Committee, the Culture and Art Committee, the Peace Committee, and the Intellectuals Committee.

The former member of the Yazidis Cultural Union, Sheikh Zahr al-Din Hasan Abdalo, who is currently residing in the al-Shahba region, testified to STJ:

“The Yazidi Cultural Union used to run all fields of the Yazidis' lives. The Union served as a civil registry, a magistrate court, a religious education center, and a cultural center that familiarizes the Yazidis with their customs and traditions and organizes ceremonies for their religious events.”

Yazidis in Syria are concentrated in Afrin district, especially in the villages of Basufan, al-Thouq al-Kabeer/Kunda Mazen, Ba'ay, Kimar, al-Ghazawiya, Iskan, Sheih al-Deir/shaderê, Burj Abdalo, Kafr Zayt, A'en Darah, Zarifa/Tûrandah, Qibar, Qatmah, Pafilion, Qastal Jando/Qestel Cindo, Sinkarli/Sinka, Ad Duha/Metîna, Ras el Ousud/Feqîran, Ashkan Sharqi/Ashqa, Ashkan Gharbi, Jaqli Jum/Çeqelê Cûmê, Maskeh Fouqani, Maskeh Tahtani.

Afrin has 19 Yazidi shrines including:

1. Barsa Khatun and Sheikh Hameed shrines in Qastal Jando/Qestel Cindo village.
2. Sheikh Gharib shrine in Sinkarli/Sînka village.
3. Jabal Khanna, Malak Adi, Burj Jundi, Ziyarah Hajari shrines in Qibar village.
4. Sheikh Junaid shrine in Ras el Ousud/Feqîran village.
5. Hoger shrine in Qarah Jarnah village.
6. Sheikh Barakat shrine in Jabal Sheikh Barakat village.
7. Sheikh Ali shrine in Basufan village.
8. Sheikh Rakab shrine in Shadriya village.
9. Sharaf Din shrine in Pafilion village.
10. Bella Manan shrine in Kafr Jannah village.
11. Bir Jafeer shrine in Mashuli near Hanan village.
12. Masha'alah shrine near Hanan village.
13. Sheikh Abdul Qadir shrine in Zarifa/Tûrandah village.
14. Sheikh Karas shrine in Deir Ballut village.
15. Abu Kaaba site in Abu Kaaba village.
16. Sheikh Qassab shrine in Burj Qas village.

Many of these shrines have been vandalized, looted and destroyed.

The Organizations that Established the School

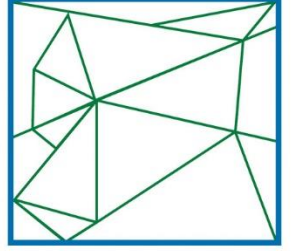
The White Hands Association/Beyaz Eller Derneği

The White Hands Association/Beyaz Eller Derneği is a charity organization with wide-reaching humanitarian relief sectors. On 27 February 2013, the organization was authorized for work in Turkey; its headquarters were established in Istanbul under the title 'BEYAZ ELLER YARDIMLAŞMA DERNEĞİ'. On 24 September 2014, the branch office in Antakya was authorized to implement projects and monitor the situation on the Turkish-Syrian borders.

The White Hands Association always states in its publications on social media that it is the executive arm of the Kuwaiti charity Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri in the region and operates with funds from it.

Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri Charity Society

[Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri Charity Society](http://www.stj-sy.org) is a Kuwaiti charity that contributes to the building and development of needy communities through educational and advocacy programs, through enhancing communication with supporters and beneficiaries, and optimizing investment of human and financial resources. The name of the Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri Charity, its logo, and the Kuwaiti flag appeared clearly in the photos and videos of laying the foundation stone and the opening of the Al-Imam wa Al-Khateeb school.



About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



WWW.STJ-SY.ORG



[STJ_SYRIA_ENG](https://twitter.com/STJ_SYRIA_ENG)



EDITOR@STJ-SY.ORG