

Press Release

International Crimes in Afrin in northern Syria: Federal Public Prosecutor's Office must investigate



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Prosecutor's Office must investigate**

Berlin, January 18, 2024 – Since 2018, armed militias with the support of Turkey have been committing crimes under international law in Afrin in northern Syria. To address these crimes, the human rights organizations the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) have filed a criminal complaint with the German Federal Public Prosecutor's Office.

Six years ago, on 19 January 2018, Turkey and allied armed militias of the Syrian National Army (SNA) began bombing the Afrin region as part of the so-called "Olive Branch" military operation. The military offensive lasted over two months and led to the displacement of more than 300,000 civilians, the majority of whom were Kurds. With the support of Turkey, the armed militias established an arbitrary rule that continues to this day.

"Afrin's population, and especially its Kurdish citizens, have faced widespread and systematic violations since 2018. These abuses range from forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and torture, to sexual violence. The seizure of the local population's property through looting and occupation as well as exorbitant taxes prevent the displaced inhabitants of Afrin from returning to their homes and is intended to force those who remain to flee," explains Bassam Alahmad, Executive Director of STJ.

These human rights violations committed by pro-Turkish and Islamist militias are crimes under international law and can be investigated anywhere in the world. Together with six survivors of the crimes, STJ, ECCHR and their partners filed a criminal complaint with the German Federal Public Prosecutor's Office on 18 January 2024, calling for a comprehensive investigation of the perpetrators.

"Three years after my release from prison, I still find myself in a painful nightmare. Everything I experienced in Afrin was cruel. Because I know that the population still has to live in similar conditions, I have dedicated my life to bring the injustice to the attention of the world, in the hope that justice will be done and that the perpetrators will be held accountable," says one survivor and complainant.

So far, the crimes of the Assad regime and Islamist groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, have been the focus of investigations by the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office. However, the suffering experienced by the predominantly Kurdish civilian population in northwestern Syria has not yet been addressed.

"Since 2011, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office has been investigating many human rights crimes committed in Syria. The trial on Syrian state torture before the Koblenz Higher Regional Court was groundbreaking. However, the atrocities committed by predominantly Islamist militias against the Kurdish population in northern Syria have so far been a blind spot in these investigations. This must change, as the militias ruling in Afrin have established a reign of violence and arbitrariness with Turkish support," comments lawyer Patrick Kroker from ECCHR.

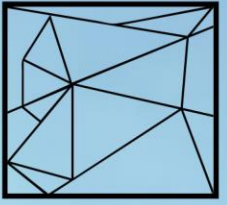
ECCHR has been working since 2012 to address the serious crimes committed in [Syria](#). Together with around 100 torture survivors, Syrian and European partner organizations, ECCHR has filed a number of criminal complaints in Germany, Austria, Sweden and Norway against high-ranking members of the Syrian security apparatus.

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Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



ECCHR

**EUROPEAN CENTER
FOR CONSTITUTIONAL
AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

ECCHR is an independent, non-profit legal and educational organization dedicated to enforcing civil and human rights worldwide. It was founded in 2007 by Wolfgang Kaleck and other international human rights lawyers to protect and enforce the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and national constitutions, through legal means.

