

Afrin: Repeated Assaults Against Kurdish Students and Minors for Motives Believed to be Discriminatory



© STJ

- Other incidents and assaults were recorded, in which the victims were Kurdish farmers, workers, and older people

June 2024



سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



Afrin: Repeated Assaults Against Kurdish Students and Minors for Motives Believed to be Discriminatory

*Other incidents and assaults were recorded, in which the victims were
Kurdish farmers, workers, and older people*



Since the beginning of 2024, cases of assault against Kurdish minors, adolescents, and students have been repeated in Afrin. Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) managed to verify no less than five cases, which are believed to be driven by discrimination directed against the indigenous people of the region, as Afrin was densely populated by Kurds until March 2018. However, the Turkish invasion significantly altered the region, turning the Kurds into an ethnic minority.

In an environment where the Kurdish community in the region lacks protection, violence among student groups persists. Kurds face systematic discriminatory policies targeting their linguistic and cultural identity. These policies, imposed by the local authorities, are promoted within schools, as revealed in a detailed [report](#) by STJ, published in 2023.

Notably, that the Kurdish students are not the only target of assaults, as other incidents of assault have been recorded against Kurdish farmers, [older people](#), and citizens while traveling between the regions of Afrin, Azaz, al-Bab, and other areas controlled by the opposition's Syrian National Army (SNA), which is backed by Türkiye.

According to sources close to two young individuals who were assaulted in Afrin and interviewed by STJ, many Kurdish students face ongoing provocations in schools operated by the opposition-affiliated [Directorate of Education in Olive Branch Strip](#). As there were some attempts to suppress their use of Kurdish, their mother tongue. These students constitute a minority in schools, with their numbers not exceeding 25% of the total student population (according to local sources,) while the majority of students are those displaced to Afrin with their families.

According to the sources, Kurdish students are facing continuous bullying from groups of displaced students. In some cases, these incidents escalate into attacks resulting in injuries. One such incident occurred at a school in the town of Maabatli/Mabeta, which caters to students from the sixth grade to senior high school. On 25 February 2024, a Kurdish student sustained five knife [stabs](#) by a displaced student. Similar stabbing incidents have occurred inside or outside schools in Afrin and its countryside. Among the most brutal incidents was the killing of the 16-year-old [Kurdish minor, Ahmed Khaled Maamou/Madda](#), merely days prior to the Kurdish national holiday, Newroz. This tragedy is reminiscent of another incident in which four members of the Peshmerga family were murdered in [the same town, Jindires](#).

In this brief report, STJ monitors the suffering of Kurdish minors in Afrin, whether at schools, workplaces, or on the streets and alleys of Afrin and its outskirts. The information included were gathered by the STJ from sources close to the affected youth, who opt to remain anonymous due to security concerns and fear of potential reprisals, given the prevailing atmosphere of impunity in the region, where means for fair accountability are lacking.

Peyman Ali¹ (a pseudonym), a relative of Shiyar Ibrahim Omar (17 years old), who is a Kurdish student in the eleventh grade, scientific field, at Maabatli School, says that the latter was stabbed five times by a displaced student from Hayyan town in Aleppo's northern countryside, and had a group of friends that bullied Kurdish students. He added:

“Since the beginning of the school year, this group has created issues with a significant number of Kurdish students. They have been provoking students to incite conflict, asserting dominance (for being older), and attempting to intimidate the Kurds, given that they were the majority, as they constitute 70 to 80% of the school's population as displaced students.”

STJ received information from Peyman confirming the opening of a prayer hall in Maabatli School, which added another reason to bullying and persecuting Kurdish students, who may

¹The interview was conducted online in May 2024.

not adhere to prayer, particularly due to the propaganda spread by certain Syrian armed groups against the Kurds, labeling them as “[atheists](#).” Peyman elaborates on how Kurdish students were typically provoked, stating:

“There were instances of 'verbal slander and passive aggressiveness', for which students could not complain to the school administration against the perpetrator. For example, [the displaced students] would walk past the Kurdish students, and utter insults that were audible to many.”

The assault on the student, Shiyar Ibrahim Omar, was carried out by four internally displaced students, at least two of whom were in possession of bladed weapons. One of them, identified as “M.A.S.” from Hayyan town in the northern countryside of Aleppo, inflicted five fatal stabs on Shiyar, targeting various parts of his body. Even after the assault, the perpetrator did not hesitate to issue threats against him, in the presence of the teaching staff, as reported by a source to STJ.

Following the stabbing, Shiyar was transferred to the Maabatli clinic near the school, as those present initially believed the wound to be a single and superficial one, since it was not apparent to those accompanying him, including his friends and the teaching staff, that he had actually sustained several stab wounds, some of which were serious, as Peyman explains:

“In the clinic, the medical staff initially assumed that Shiyar had sustained a single, superficial knife wound. However, as they lifted his shirt, it became evident that there were multiple wounds. They discovered a total of five stab wounds, extending from the waist to the back. The clinic provided first aid, and Shiyar was then transported by ambulance to al-Amanos Hospital in Afrin. Upon examination, doctors determined that he required abdominal surgery due to internal bleeding. One stab wound had pierced his lung, another had punctured his spleen, and a third had penetrated his intestines. These injuries were deemed severe, while the remaining wounds to his back were less damaging.”

The surgeries required Shiyar to remain hospitalized for five days. People close to the student held the school and education administration in Maabatli responsible for the attack, as they cited the administration's repeated refusal to agree to Shiyar's family's request to transfer him from Maabatli School to Mirkan School in a village within the same area. This was prompted by the ongoing provocations faced by Kurdish students, and families' realizing the abnormal conditions surrounding the educational process, which posed significant threats to their children's safety. Shiyar's case was not isolated, where several other Kurdish students also requested transfers from Maabatli School due to feeling threatened by displaced students, according to the source interviewed by STJ.

Following Shiyar's stabbing, the district's security forces failed to consider the circumstances surrounding the crime, as the investigations did not take into account the signs of group bullying or potential discriminatory motives behind the assault. Instead, the Civil Police classified it as a group fight, according to Peyman. Consequently, the perpetrator was arrested along with three of his friends. Additionally, four Kurdish students, who were friends of Shiyar, were also arrested, presumably to portray the incident as a “fight.” They were all released after a week of detention, except for the perpetrator, who remained in custody for nearly a month and was expelled from school.

Peyman said due to the pressure and “to prevent further potential problems,” Shiyar's parents decided to waive their rights:

“When Shiyar was discharged from the hospital, a delegation of notables from Hayyan sought reconciliation with his family, urging them to waive their right. Shiyar's father

agreed under the condition that the perpetrator's father would not visit their home, as the family was unable to confront them directly. So, Shiyar's father went to court and waived his son's right. Subsequently, the judge summoned Shiyar, who, in turn, waived his right, leading to the release of the perpetrator approximately twenty days after the incident.”

The assault on Shiyar and his friends was not an isolated incident within the school, nor was it the only assault perpetrated by the same group. Peyman confirmed to STJ that displaced students continuously attempted to provoke Kurdish students, aiming to incite them into armed conflict, where the displaced students held the upper hand, exploiting the prevailing conditions in the region where the Kurdish students are hindered from defending themselves, while the displaced students openly carry bladed weapons to school without restraint from the administration. On this aspect, Peyman explained:

“These incidents exclusively target Kurdish students, driven by a deep-seated hatred towards any Kurd. Often, they explicitly forbid Kurdish students from speaking Kurdish in class, asserting that they (displaced students) would not allow it. This suppression extends beyond the school to reach the streets as well.”

The assault at Maabatli School had a profound impact on Shiyar and his friends' lives. Shiyar, in particular, suffered nine wounds from the stabbings and subsequent life-saving surgeries. During the week of their arrest, his four friends were subjected to beatings and torture by the civil police, receiving equal punishment to the perpetrators, as reported by the previous source. This prompted one of Shiyar's friends to withdraw from school, as the situation remained unchanged after the stabbing incident, with no improvement in conditions. Regarding this, Peyman said:

“There are now nine wounds on Shiyar's body, including five injuries from knife strikes. Additionally, he underwent a laparotomy operation, closed with 27 surgical stitches, and three wounds resulted from surgical procedures. These have significantly impacted his health, rendering him unable to perform as before. He also struggles to lift weights or move comfortably and experiences occasional shortness of breath due to his lung being penetrated.”

Similar to Shiyar's case, another assault occurred against a young Kurdish man named [Rudy Mohammad Jaqal](#) (16 years old), from Jindires town residing in Afrin, who works as a tailor. On the 15th of last March, he was returning home from work when a masked person intercepted him at night. After learning of his Kurdish identity, the assailant stabbed him in the thigh with a knife, threatening to kill him later.

Amin Sido² (a pseudonym), a relative of the Kurdish minor's family, recounted, “On the day of the incident, Rudy was returning from work (tailor) around eight o'clock in the evening. A masked person emerged on the road and asked him about his origins. Rudy responded that he was a Kurd from Jindires. In response, the masked man slapped Rudy in the face, then proceeded to stab him in the right thigh, uttering:

“Go and say goodbye to your family, because we will kill you.”

Rudy's family struggled to identify their assailant, particularly given that they are related to the Peshmerga family, which lost four members during the Newroz in 2023. The security services in Afrin only goal was to prevent the family from publicizing the assault against their son, but

² The interview was conducted online in May 2024.

their efforts proved futile as the news quickly spread. However, within three days, the case faded from public attention, and no serious effort was made to apprehend the assailant, as Amin explains:

“On the night of Rudy’s stabbing, all the security services in Afrin stayed up all night. Members from the civil, military, political, and intelligence police all visited his family’s home, pledging to catch and arrest the perpetrator. However, they requested the family to not disclose the incident to the media. The following day, officials visited the family again. However, by the third day, the case had faded.”

He added:

“After being stabbed, Rudy tried to walk to a nearby hospital when he encountered a Kurdish person (adult) and sought him to help take him to the hospital. However, the person, worried about his own safety, refused to assist Rudy and fled. Consequently, Rudy had to make his own way to the hospital.”



Rudy after receiving treatment in one of Afrin’s hospitals. Source: Afrin-based activists.

Shiyar and Rudy’s stories are just two examples that have made their way into the news. However, many other Kurdish youth face similar assaults and attacks, often remained unknown, where no one dares to extend a helping hand to them, even when attacks occur in broad daylight, and even if the families of the victims are present, as Amin narrated:

“A few days ago, a Kurdish young man was severely beaten and abused in a park by about 15 people from Damascus. Despite the appeals and cries for help from the victim’s mother, none of the Kurds dared to intervene. These assaults specifically target Kurdish citizens, as others have backing and support from local authorities. If the victim

was non-Kurdish, people of the same region as him would often intervene to assist. However, Kurdish citizens hesitate to help one another due to fear of repercussions, as such matters are often politicized.”

On March 13th of this year, the region witnessed the murder of a Kurdish youth. 18-year-old displaced Yamen Ahmed Ibrahim killed 16-year-old Kurdish minor Ahmed Khaled Maamo\Mada by stabbing him with a knife. The perpetrator then threw Ahmed into a water well approximately 30 meters deep. Following this incident, [the office of the Kurdish National Council \(KNC\) in Afrin, Syria](#), urged both the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition and Türkiye to end violations in Afrin.

The KNC stated on its Facebook page: “This incident coincides with the proximity of the first anniversary of the brutal terrorist massacre committed against the Peshmerga family on the night of Newroz, when gunmen shot young men for lighting the flame of Newroz.” It also called on Türkiye to shoulder its responsibilities by taking decisive stances against all violations and injustices. Additionally, it urged the international community to fulfill its legal and moral obligations towards the region.



ABOUT STJ

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.

STJ's beginnings were more than humble; initially, it only reported stories of Syrians who experienced arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture. Planted in fertile soil, the seed of this project grew into an established human rights organization licensed in the Middle East and the European Union. STJ today undertakes to detect and uncover violations of all types committed in all Syrian parts by the various parties to the conflict.

Convinced that Syria's diversity is a wealth, our researchers and volunteers serve with unfailing dedication to monitor, expose, and document human rights violations that continue unabated in Syria since 2011, regardless of the affiliation of the victims or perpetrators.