

Syria: Statement on the Passage of Five Years Since the Occupation of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad During “Peace Spring” Operation

126 Organizations call for ceasing the occupation, ensuring a voluntary, safe and dignified return for the IDPs, halting demographic changes, and adopting a reparations-based approach for those affected, as part of a comprehensive process that guarantees accountability and justice for the victims

Five years have passed since the Turkish occupation of areas of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad as a result of the military operation dubbed “Peace Spring”, which began on October 9, 2019, under the pretext of establishing a “ Safe Zone”. However, the reality has been the opposite. The region has lost its safety and stability, as well as continues to endure widespread violations and the absence of the rule of law.

The military incursion displaced more than 200,000 indigenous people from these areas, with Turkey and the Turkish-backed factions of the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) indiscriminately bombarding civilian buildings and systematically looting private properties belonging to locals of various backgrounds, particularly the Kurds. Moreover, the SNA factions have prevented hundreds of displaced families from returning to their homes and reclaiming their properties.

Tens of thousands of indigenous people remain forcibly displaced in dire humanitarian conditions in makeshift camps and shelters that lack support and official recognition from UN agencies. According to independent local Syrian organizations, more than 85% of the inhabitants of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê are still forcibly displaced, with the Kurdish population dwindling from 75,000 to just 50 individuals, the numbers of Armenian, Syriac, and Yezidi residents have also fallen to no more than a handful. Meanwhile, thousands of displaced families from other Syrian regions have been settled in the homes of those who were forcibly displaced, along with dozens of Iraqi families, including relatives of Islamic State (ISIS) fighters. Let alone the Turkish [public](#) attempts to settle one million Syrian refugees in these areas.

The endeavors of the Turkish authorities and armed factions of the opposition Syrian National Coalition (SNC) to alter the demographic and culture composition of these areas through forced displacement, resettling other groups in the homes of the indigenous population, and overt Turkification practices, constitute a crime against the indigenous people. These actions are punishable under international law and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and represent an attempt to change the entire identity of the region.

Turkey, which has effectively controlled all military and civil aspects in the region for the past five years, has failed to assume its responsibilities under the international law, and it has not taken any tangible and serious measures to protect civilians or improve the situations. Instead, it has turned a blind eye to the widespread violations committed by the SNA factions. Consequently, crimes, such as looting, pillage, murder, and abductions have been rife in these regions, as the absence of accountability encourages these violations to perpetuate, and exacerbate the suffering of the local people.

As an occupying power, Turkey is obligated under Article 43 of the 1907 Hague Regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to take all the measures in its power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety. This obligation includes the duty to ensure respect for the applicable rules of International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), as well as to protect the population of the occupied territories from acts of violence and not to tolerate such violence by any third party.

Despite Turkey’s commitments under the “Ceasefire [Agreement](#)”, signed with the US on October 17, 2019, stipulating in several items to “pledge to uphold human rights, protect

religious and ethnic communities, ensure the safety and well-being of all residents in the zone controlled by Turkey, and exercise maximum care in order not to cause harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure,” Turkey has evaded its responsibilities towards the population and turned a blind eye to the wide-scale violations and crimes committed during and after the operation. This has led to rampant looting, pillage, murder, kidnappings, and arbitrary detention.

Ending the occupation, ensuring the return of the displaced to their homes, and compensating those affected within a framework that guarantees accountability and justice for the victims are the most urgent demands from the perspective of the organizations signing this statement. Achieving any sustainable peaceful settlement is impossible without accomplishing justice for the victims and ensuring that such crimes are not repeated. On this painful occasion, we reaffirm that the issue of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad is a critical national humanitarian matter for its displaced inhabitants, who look forward to the day when their homes are free and safe once again.

Accordingly, we, the undersigned organizations to this statement, call on:

1. **The United Nations and the UN Security Council:** To end the occupation, ensure the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of IDPs in line with UN standards that safeguard their rights, officially recognize the camps housing displaced people, and provide necessary support to alleviate their suffering.
2. **The United States Government:** to ensure the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, compel Turkey to adhere to its provisions on protecting civilians, impose sanctions on factions and armed groups responsible for violations and crimes against civilians, work towards the return of forcibly displaced persons to their original areas, and support the IDPs residing in camps.
3. **The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) and the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM):** to release a special report about human rights violations in the Turkish-controlled territories and establish structural investigations on these violations.
4. **The Turkish Government:** to assume its responsibilities as an occupying power, prevent factions and armed groups from harming the civilian population, establish a specific timetable for ending its occupation of the regions to ensure a safe return for the residents to their homes, and stop weaponizing water, in the occupied territories, against the residents in northeast Syria.
5. **The European Union (EU):** to support projects that alleviate suffering of the IDPs residing in the camps and shelters, pressure Turkey to stop supporting factions and groups that commit crimes and violations against the residents, work to hold accountable perpetrators of war crimes and violations in these areas through a process that guarantees accountability and redress for the victims, as no sustainable peaceful settlement can be achieved without justice for the victims.

The signatory organizations to the statement, listed in alphabetical order are:

1. Accountability Advocates Organization
2. Act for Afrin
3. Adil Center for human Rights
4. Afrin Platform
5. Afrin Social Association
6. Al Ahd
7. Al Diyar Society
8. Al Ghaith Development
9. Al Nawras Development Organization
10. Al Zajel
11. Amal Al Furat Org
12. Ambassadors Association for People with Disabilities
13. Analysis and Strategic Studies Organization (ASO)
14. Anwar Algahd
15. ARAS Association
16. Areej Organisation
17. Artis Team for Arts, Culture and Children
18. Ashna Development Organization
19. ashti center
20. Aso News network
21. Bader Organization for Community Development
22. Baladna
23. BALLOON
24. Bridges of Peace
25. Bukra Ahla Association for Relief and Development
26. Center for Research and Protection of Women's Rights
27. Centerofliertiesbefense
28. Chaushka Women's Association

29. Cloud Org
30. Community Solidarity Organization
31. DAN for Relief and Development
32. Dar Association for the Victims of Forced Displacement
33. Das Leben
34. DemoS
35. Development Seeds Centre
36. Dijla Organization for Development and Environment
37. DOZ Organization
38. Dya Al Aml
39. Edraak Organization for Development and Peace
40. Ella organization for development and peace building
41. Emaar Al Mansura
42. Engineering for Services
43. Enlil Center
44. Environmental Protection Association
45. Ezdina Organization
46. Fajr
47. Foor Them
48. Future Makers Team
49. Hevy for relief and development
50. HLD
51. Hope Makers
52. House of Citizenship Organization
53. Human rights organization Afrin - Syria
54. Human Rights Organization in Syria
55. Humanitarian and Development Cooperation - HDC
56. Insight Organization
57. Jian Humanitarian Organization

58. Jiyan foundation for human rights
59. Kobani for Relief and Development
60. Kurdish Cultural Association in Geneva
61. Lamasat Al Khair Association for Relief and Development
62. Lêlun Association for Victims
63. Lights For Development And Construction
64. Lots Association
65. Malva Organization for Arts, Culture and Education
66. Mary for culture
67. Mawj for Development
68. Missing Persons' Families Platform in North and East Syria (MPFP-NES)
69. Nabd Team
70. Nasmel Amal
71. NES -LNGO- Platform
72. Nour Al-Huda Charity Association
73. Nowat organization
74. Nûdem
75. Nudem Organization
76. Nujeen Association of Community Development
77. Okaz
78. Organization "Swaedna for Relief and Development
79. Orgnaization of Zagon
80. Orient Association
81. Oxygen shabab
82. Peac Tent
83. Peace land organization
84. Peace Pioneers
85. PEACE SHE LEADER NETWORK
86. PÊL- Civil Waves

87. Purity
88. Raja Organization for Relief and Development
89. Ras Al-Ayn Platform
90. RÊ for rehabilitation and development
91. Reng for Development
92. Restoring Hope
93. Rights Defense Initiative- RDI
94. Rojava Relief and Development Organization
95. Rose
96. Sahem Organization for Cooperation and Development
97. Salam Organization
98. Sanad Humanitarian Organization
99. Sara Organization to Combat Violence Against Women
100. Sawaeed Organization for Development
101. SCSD
102. Shamal Charitable Society
103. SHARE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
104. Silav Organization for Civil Activities
105. Small Dreams Group
106. SMART Center
107. Stability Support Center.
108. Synergy Association for Victims
109. Syriac Cross Organization for Relief and Development
110. Syrians for Truth and Justice - STJ
111. Syrin Help Organization
112. Taa Marbouta
113. Tara Organization
114. The Committee for the Displaced of Serêkaniyê /Ras al-Ain.
115. Tree of Life Development Organization

116. Warshin AssociatiOn Of Environment
 117. Weqaya Association
 118. Wheat & Olive Platform
 119. White Hope Organization
 120. White Human Organization
 121. Women for Peace
 122. Women Initiatives
 123. Youth for Change
 124. Zameen for Development and Peace Building
 125. Zhrat Al Furat Org
 126. Zorana for Development
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