

Olive Levies in Afrin: “There Is No Law Protecting Farmers; What Prevails Is Jungle Law”

STJ Affirms Victims’ Right To Fair Compensation, Through Civil Courts Or Transitional Justice, For Abuses By Armed Factions, Including Land Confiscation, Crop Theft, Torture, And Threats Of Rape Or Murder



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1. Executive Summary

In this comprehensive report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) examines the systematic and widespread practices of looting and extortion in the Kurdish-majority Afrin/Efrîn region. The report focuses on the taxes levied on olive farmers by factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA) since their takeover of the area following the 2018 Operation Olive Branch.

The report relies on 39 detailed testimonies from Kurdish witnesses, including farmers, landowners, and olive press owners, who described the heavy fees imposed on their main sources of income. These fees are mainly enforced by various factions of the SNA, such as the Sultan Suleiman Shah Division (also known as al-Amshat), the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, the Sultan Murad Division, the Muntasir Billah Brigade, the Mu'tasim Division (formerly Liwa' al-Mu'tasim Billah), the Ninth Brigade, the Sham Legion/Faylaq al-Sham, and Faction 51 of the Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya, among others. As a result, while millions of U.S. dollars (USD) have been taken through these practices, farmers are left struggling to survive between harvest seasons.

The amounts levied on farmers varied by controlling faction and, in some cases, even by village. While the names of these levies differed, they encompassed nearly every aspect of the olive industry. Taxes were imposed on both productive and non-productive trees, their protection, the harvest, olive pressing, oil production, and trade. Factions collected these payments either in cash or in kind, often seizing a portion of the harvest or oil, through their economic and security offices. In some instances, village mukhtars assisted by providing information on the number of trees each farmer owned. Additionally, some faction members imposed and collected unofficial levies for their own personal gain.

Olive groves subject to levies included those owned by individuals displaced within Afrin, other parts of Syria, or abroad. These owners often relied on relatives or acquaintances to tend and harvest the land. The amount of the levy varied depending on the owner's location and the faction in control. Many of these properties were also seized under various pretexts.

Many farmers face harassment aimed at forcing them to pay extortion fees. Those who resist often suffer beatings, arbitrary arrests, property confiscations, and even destruction of their olive trees. Both official and unofficial justice systems are practically nonexistent, and those that do exist are mostly ineffective. This situation persists amid widespread impunity.

This report is issued less than a year after the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, serving as an early warning to urgently protect farmers' rights and livelihoods and to prevent their ongoing exploitation by factions of the SNA in 2025. These factions still exercise de facto control over large parts of Afrin, despite the reported dissolution of the SNA and its nominal integration into the new government's Ministry of Defense, which now bears the responsibility for ensuring protection.

For the sake of clarity and consistency, this report uses the term 'SNA' to refer to these factions and their political and military affiliations during the documented period, irrespective of any subsequent changes in their status or alignment.

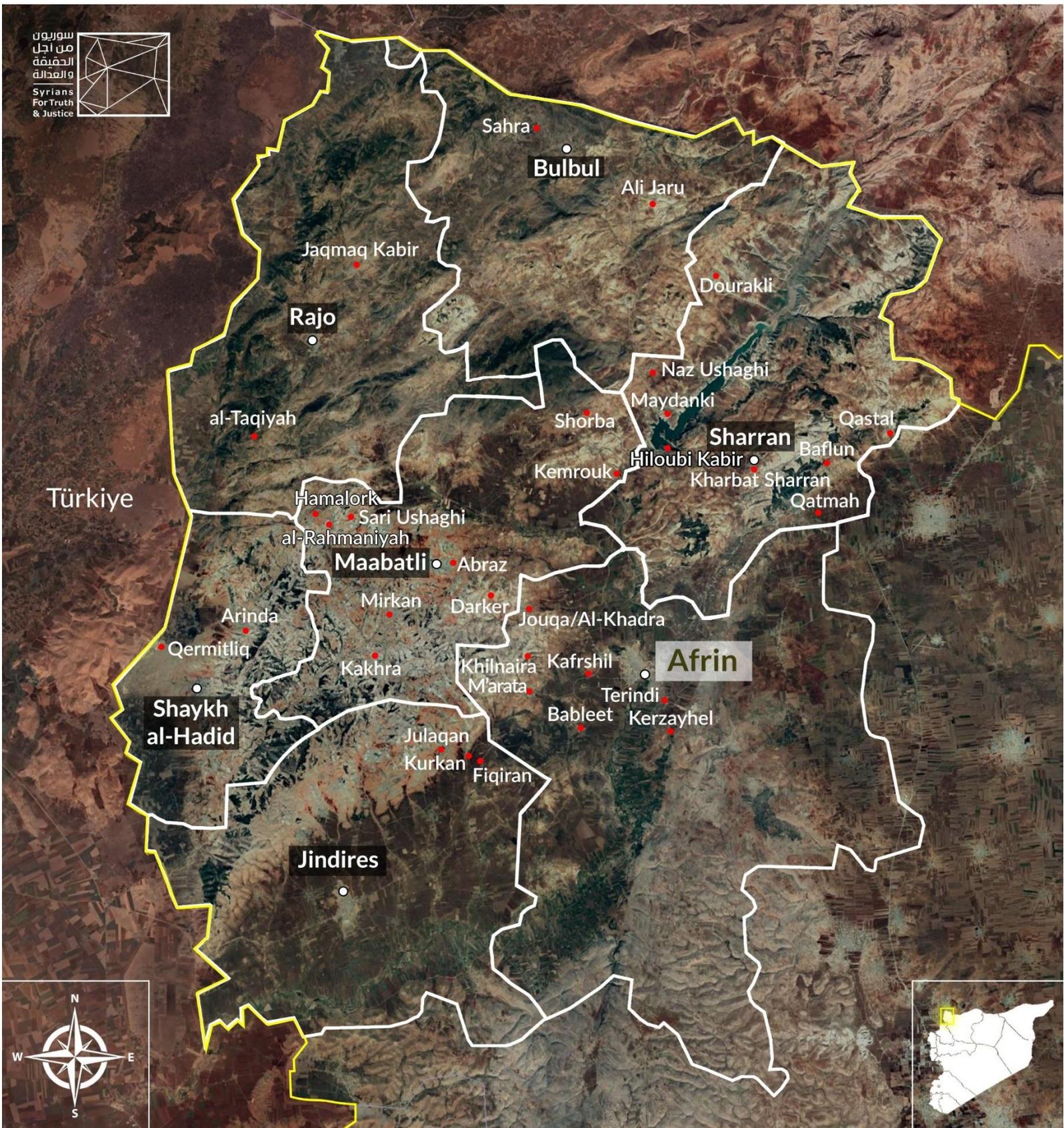


Image (1) – A map created by STJ illustrating the locations of the violations documented in this report in Afrin.

2. Legal Opinion and Recommendations

2.1. From The Perspective Of Syrian Legislation

The documented facts in this report reveal a systematic pattern of violations carried out by factions affiliated with the SNA against the Kurdish civilian population and olive farmers in the Afrin region of northern Syria. These violations, including levying taxes on agricultural production and property, restricting property rights, and extorting residents through force and violence, constitute blatant breaches of the provisions of the former Syrian Constitution, the current Constitutional Declaration,¹ the Civil Code,² the Penal Code,³ the Personal Status Law and its amendments,⁴ and the Law on the Transfer of Immovable Property (state-owned/Amiri lands).⁵ All of these laws remain in effect under the provisions of the Constitutional Declaration and were also applicable at the time these violations took place.

The 2025 Syrian Constitutional Declaration clearly states that, “[T]he right to private property is protected, and it may not be expropriated except for the public benefit and in return for fair compensation.” However, contrary to this clause, armed factions have engaged in what amounts to open theft of civilian property by charging excessive fees or taking a significant percentage of agricultural yields from olive farmers, whether they lived on their land or had relatives authorized to manage it on their behalf. In some instances, the share taken reached as high as 60% of the total production, as documented in the villages of Kerzayhel/Kurzêlê Terindi/Tirindi. One farmer testified,

“The heir’s relative was told he was entitled to only 7 sacks out of 30”.

¹ The Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, Constitution Net, 13 March 2025, <https://constitutionnet.org/vl/item/constitutional-declaration-syria-2025> (last accessed 29 July 2025).

² The Syrian Civil Code, available at: <https://www.syrian-lawyer.club/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A.pdf> (last accessed 29 July 2025).

³ The Syrian Penal Code, available at: <https://www.undp-aci.org/publications/ac/compendium/syria/criminalization-lawenforcement/sy-penal-code.pdf> (last accessed 29 July 2025).

⁴ The Syrian Personal Status Law, available at: <https://feminpoliticalacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%84.pdf> (last accessed: 29 July 2025).

⁵ Amal Sharba, The Legal System of Amiri Lands in Syria [in Arabic], Private Law Department – Faculty of Law, University of Damascus, available at: https://journals.ekb.eg/article_268519_14b6900458f0399f1b118f2288c2842d.pdf (last accessed 29 July 2025)

Some factions went so far as to openly violate all relevant laws by blocking heirs from managing their inherited properties, claiming that these lands were "subject to power of attorney" simply because one of the heirs lived outside Afrin. This action clearly violates the Syrian Civil Code, which states that, "[A]nyone who acquires property through inheritance becomes its legal owner before registration", and that "[T]he right to register property in the Land Registry can be established through various means, including inheritance." (Articles 825 and 826). It also breaches the provisions of the Syrian Personal Status Law, which governs the transfer of ownership through inheritance according to legally prescribed shares.

The imposed levies formed a systematic mechanism of impoverishment and extortion, where arbitrary taxes, either paid in cash or kind, were levied on olive trees, regardless of their productivity. In some instances, the fees amounted to as much as \$8 per tree. In the village of Kemrouk/Gemrûkê, the al-Amshat faction demanded a collective sum of \$250,000 from residents in exchange for permission to harvest their crops. Such levies violate Article 768 of the Syrian Civil Code, which states, "The owner of a thing has, within the limits of the law, the exclusive right to use it, exploit it, and dispose of it." It also violates Article 770, which affirms that, "The owner is entitled to all fruits, products, and appurtenances of the property unless otherwise provided by law or agreement."

Some factions treated lands held under the power of attorney as lawless territory; either seizing them outright or imposing exorbitant levies of up to 60% of the harvest. They also practiced blatant discrimination between resident and absentee owners, despite the Law on the Transfer of Amiri Lands clearly outlining that inheritance and ownership rights apply regardless of the owner's place of residence.

Furthermore, requiring farmers to present the 'green title deed' (Green Tapo/*Tapo Akhdar*) to prove ownership in areas mainly consisting of Amiri lands, where the state has not issued official title deeds, constitutes intentional obstruction and acts as a pretext for land confiscation. This is despite the Syrian Civil Code recognizing that possession of property over a certain period, combined with the appearance of ownership without dispute, provides a valid basis for acquiring ownership and grants the possessor the right to register the property in the Land Registry after a specific period (Articles 911, 917, and 918). This is assuming, however, that the agricultural property owners whose testimonies were collected for the purposes of this report do not possess any documents proving their ownership of these properties. According to many testimonies, farmers were forced to sell their olive oil to specific merchants designated by the factions, at prices set unilaterally by those factions. They were also

prevented from removing their product from the mill unless certain fees were paid. One farmer explained,

"If you do not sell the oil to the faction's merchant, you must pay \$500 to the local council."

This practice violates Article 771 of the Syrian Civil Code, which prohibits depriving anyone of their property except by law and in exchange for fair compensation. It also undermines the principles of freedom of contract and lawful property disposal.

The factions' actions reached a grave level of serious violations, including torture and attempted murder. One testimony describes an incident where a victim was threatened,

"If you do not pay, we will bring your wife and rape her in front of you."

He was then subjected to severe beating and torture, and was abandoned at his doorstep. In another case, around twenty faction members assaulted an owner who refused to pay the imposed levy, threw him from the second floor, resulting in a pelvic fracture, and then forced him to pay the demanded amount. These acts constitute the felony of robbery with violence under Article 624 of the Syrian Penal Code and qualify as attempted murder under Article 534, read in conjunction with Article 188, provided it is established that the perpetrator foresaw the fatal outcome and accepted the risk. Additionally, the use of rape threats as a means of coercion constitutes the crime of felony threats under Articles 560 and 561 of the Penal Code. Such acts violate human dignity and fall within the scope of torture and cruel treatment, both prohibited under Syrian law and international conventions ratified by Syria.

Furthermore, coercing property owners, such as widows, to sign powers of attorney over inherited estates, including olive orchards passed down from deceased husbands, and subsequently treating these properties as if they were power-of-attorney-managed assets, constitutes the offense of signature forgery under Article 635 of the Syrian Penal Code. This article stipulates imprisonment with hard labor for a term ranging from three months to two years for anyone who, through threat or coercion, forges a signature or a document involving an obligation or release, with the intent to secure a benefit for themselves or others unlawfully, or compels another person to act or refrain from acting in a manner that harms their own or another's property.

The report also emphasizes that the taxes imposed on the population are not based on any legal framework, but are instead dictated by the factions' customs or arbitrary decrees. As one farmer remarked,

"The faction decides what it wants and says: 'These are spoils from the liberation of Afrin; all of Afrin belongs to us, and no one has the right to claim ownership or inheritance.'"

This statement alone illustrates the absence of the rule of law and the existence of a de facto authority upheld by force rather than by legal institutions, revealing a clear gap in governmental control. Such a reality stands in direct contradiction to the Constitutional Declaration, which explicitly affirms the establishment of a state founded on citizenship, freedom, dignity, and the rule of law, as stated in its preamble.

2.2. From The Perspective Of International Law

International humanitarian law (IHL) addresses issues of individual and collective property during armed conflict through a comprehensive legal framework, highlighting the importance and sensitivity of this subject. Notably, the concept of property under international law is not limited to physical assets like buildings or land; it also includes anything owned by an individual, whether tangible, spatial, or even digital. Therefore, commercial assets, financial revenues, and agricultural crops all qualify as protected property and are subject to legal regulation.

Since IHL aims to reduce the effects of armed conflict, it sets clear limits on how parties to the conflict can handle property. The main rule is that individual and collective property must not be disturbed in any way, and any exception to this rule is narrowly defined and subject to strict legal conditions. Therefore, the legal framework that governs property under IHL explicitly bans practices like looting, destruction or unlawful seizure of enemy property, and improper treatment of property by occupying forces in controlled territories.

The concept of 'levies' discussed in this report falls within the broader practice of taxation imposed by parties in conflict on civilian populations under their control. Such practices are common in armed conflicts in general, particularly in non-international armed conflicts. They have been extensively analyzed in academic circles and have garnered significant attention in international legal jurisprudence. Since the provisions of IHL do not cover the imposition of taxes itself, most studies and judicial decisions have concluded that this practice should be examined within the framework of property rules and principles in general, especially under the rule prohibiting pillage.

Although ‘pillage’ is explicitly prohibited under multiple provisions of IHL,⁶ none of these instruments offer a clear or comprehensive definition of the term. As a result, the definition established through international jurisprudence has become the authoritative reference for assessing the legality of conduct and determining whether it qualifies as pillage. According to this jurisprudence, ‘pillage’ can be defined as the appropriation or obtaining of public or private property by an individual without the owner’s consent, in violation of IHL.⁷

To determine whether such appropriation is legal, it must be assessed if it is justified under IHL, such as through military necessity or efforts to weaken the enemy’s military strength. Recognizing this distinction, the Elements of Crimes of the International Criminal Court (ICC) include the requirement of “personal or private use” of the appropriated property as an essential part of the crime of pillage, setting it apart from other offenses involving the destruction or seizure of enemy property.⁸ Therefore, the act of imposing fees on property owners or their legal agents, whether labeled as levies or taxes, must be evaluated based on the core elements of the crime of pillage. These elements include: the connection to the armed conflict, the act of seizure, whether the rightful owner’s consent was given, whether the act is legal or illegal under IHL, and the purpose behind the appropriation. Regardless of the legal status of Turkish control over the areas addressed in this report, these regions have experienced a prolonged non-international armed conflict. During this period, the non-state armed groups mentioned in the report have gained effective control over these territories and their populations, assuming de facto state functions and responsibilities. Members of these groups impose fees, either independently or under orders from their leaders, using their military power and territorial dominance to force the affected populations to pay. The ‘connection to the armed conflict’ requirement states that a person’s capacity, intent, and decision to engage in conduct governed by IHL must be significantly influenced or facilitated by the existence of the armed conflict.⁹ In other words, the armed conflict must play a crucial role, without which such conduct would not be possible¹⁰.

⁶ For example: The Fourth Hague Convention respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its Annex: Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907, Articles 28 and 47; First Geneva Convention of 1949, Article 15; Second Geneva Convention of 1949, Article 18; Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, Article 33; and Additional Protocol II of 1977, Article 4(2)(g).

⁷ See: ICRC Commentary to the First Geneva Convention of 1949, Commentary on Article 15, para. 1494, Geneva 2016, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gci-1949/article-15/commentary/2016?activeTab=1949GCs-APs-and-commentaries#_Toc452460353 (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁸ International Criminal Court, Elements of Crimes, p. 25, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁹ See in this context:

ICRC, International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts (2019), p. 53; <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-report-ihl-and-challenges-contemporary-armed-conflicts> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹⁰ Prosecutor v Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovac and Zoran Vukovic (Appeal Judgment) [2002]

In assessing whether the imposition of such fees constitutes the 'seizure' required to establish the crime of pillage, the ICC defines seizure as the act of gaining control over property.¹¹ Accordingly, when an armed group takes possession of civilian property, such as money or agricultural goods, and asserts control over it, this conduct may reasonably be considered a form of seizure.

It is essential to distinguish between the lawful collection of taxes and fees by a sovereign state and similar practices carried out by non-state armed groups. Under international law, sovereignty confers upon the state a primary responsibility for its population and grants it legitimate authority to exercise control and enact relevant legislation. Non-state armed groups, by contrast, cannot claim parity with states by superficially justifying property seizures as tax collection. While IHL ensures equal obligations for parties to an armed conflict concerning conduct during hostilities, it does not permit contradictions with the broader framework of international law, particularly with respect to sovereignty and the lawful exercise of governmental powers. In this context, the absence of consent from the original or lawful property owner is a critical factor in determining whether the imposed fees are lawful or amount to the crime of pillage. Consent is assessed on two levels: individual and collective. At the individual level, the focus is on whether the property owner has directly consented, or failed to consent, to the seizure of their property. A lack of consent need not always be explicit; it can be inferred from the owner's absence or from the use of coercion, intimidation, or violence against them.¹² At the collective level, consent is examined in situations where non-state armed groups attempt to establish tax systems that mimic those of sovereign states. In such cases, collective consent is evaluated based on the population's degree of participation in governance structures and whether that participation indicates meaningful approval of the taxes imposed. Based on the cases documented in this report, it is reasonable to conclude that neither individual nor collective consent exists. Testimonies from direct witnesses confirm this absence. At the collective level, it is evident that the fees and levies are not part of a legitimate, participatory system of governance. Instead, they are enforced by armed groups and their commanders, whose actions reflect extractive practices aimed at consolidating control and extracting resources, rather than supporting governance or delivering public services, as would be expected of lawful taxation systems.

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia IT 96 23 & 23/1 ("Kunarac Appeal Judgment"), para. 58.

¹¹ Prosecutor v Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo (Trial Judgment) [2016] International Criminal Court (ICC), ICC-01/05-01/08-3343 ("Bemba Trial Judgment"), para. 115.

¹² See for example: Bemba Trial Judgment, para. 115; Prosecutor v Momcilo Krajsnik (Trial Judgment) [2006] International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia IT-00-39-T, para. 821.

It is essential to assess the imposition of levies as a form of property appropriation through the lens of IHL, which restricts lawful appropriation to instances of imperative military necessity. A definitive conclusion requires a careful examination of the intent behind these acts, specifically, whether the levies imposed are genuinely motivated by urgent military needs or whether they serve private or personal interests. Based on the patterns documented in this report, including the methods used and the objectives pursued by armed groups in imposing these levies, it is unreasonable to interpret such practices as stemming from military necessity as required by IHL. On the contrary, the goal of personal enrichment is apparent. The use of coercion, intimidation, and punitive measures against non-compliant individuals, such as the destruction of olive trees and the obstruction of agricultural and commercial activity, evidences this. The absence of public-interest aims, combined with the lack of meaningful community participation in governance, further reinforces the conclusion that these levies are imposed primarily for the personal or institutional benefit of armed groups, their members, and their leadership. As such, these actions do not meet the legal threshold for lawful appropriation under IHL and strongly support their classification as acts of pillage.

2.3. Recommendations

The testimonies presented in this report reveal consistent patterns of serious violations, including the seizure of property and the imposition of unlawful levies on agricultural products. These abuses are frequently accompanied by physical violence, humiliation, and even torture. This situation demands urgent intervention by the Syrian Interim Government, as well as by civil society organizations engaged in documentation, accountability, and victim support. To address these violations and ensure justice for affected communities, STJ offers the following recommendations:

1. Conduct thorough and unbiased investigations into all reported violations in the Afrin region, including extortion, torture, property confiscation, threats, and assaults against farmers. Perpetrators must be referred to the appropriate judicial authorities in accordance with proper legal procedures;
2. Ensure that these investigations uphold fair trial guarantees for all detainees, in line with Article 28 of the Syrian Constitution and Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Judicial independence and impartiality must be strictly observed throughout the process;
3. Issue an official statement urging everyone affected by such violations, whether in Afrin or elsewhere, to submit documented complaints against those responsible. These

- complaints should be filed with the public prosecutor or relevant authorities to ensure legal accountability;
4. Issue clear and binding government directives to all military formations under the authority of the Ministry of Defense to immediately cease any practices that violate private property, personal freedoms, or human dignity, especially the imposition of levies or unlawful interference in civilians' economic activities;
 5. Issue binding instructions to all military formations emphasizing the need to adhere to the provisions of the 2025 Constitutional Declaration, especially the guarantee that private property is protected and cannot be expropriated or interfered with except in accordance with the law, for public benefit, and in exchange for fair compensation;
 6. Reiterate that protecting property and individual rights is not only a constitutional obligation but also a legal duty stemming from Syria's international commitments, especially under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the ICCPR, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR);
 7. Take decisive action to end the policy of impunity by activating the roles of the Public Prosecution and the Oversight and Inspection Authority, referring military and civilian perpetrators of violations to the judiciary, and ensuring that military commanders are held accountable for serious abuses committed by units under their command;
 8. Reaffirm the right of victims to seek fair compensation for material and moral damages through civil courts or transitional justice mechanisms, including cases of land grabbing, crop theft, torture, and threats of rape or murder;
 9. Allow the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI-Syria) and all relevant UN Special Rapporteurs to visit Syria, assess the local situation, meet with victims and civil society, and issue binding recommendations to promote accountability and rebuild trust in the justice system;
 10. Issue an official invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing to visit Syria, assess the living conditions of the population, evaluate violations of property rights and forced evictions, and submit a comprehensive report to the Human Rights Council with practical recommendations for restoring rights to their owners;
 11. National and international human rights groups must continue their efforts to monitor and document violations, especially in areas previously controlled by armed factions, and promote a culture of legal recourse among affected communities;
 12. Human rights organizations should encourage and support victims and residents in engaging with relevant actors, particularly the National Commission for Transitional

Justice and appropriate courts, and in submitting any available evidence or testimonies as they strive to reclaim their rights and property, ensure accountability, and prevent the recurrence of such violations.



Image (2) – An exclusive photo by STJ showing a Kurdish farmer during the olive harvest season in Afrin.

3. Methodology

For this report, STJ conducted comprehensive research from December 2023 to June 2025. The study included interviews with 39 Kurdish individuals who either witnessed or were victims of extortion by factions of the SNA targeting the olive sector in the Afrin region, which comprises its seven districts: Afrin Center/Navenda Efrîn, Shaykh al-Hadid/Şiyê, Rajo/Reco/Raju, Maabatli/Mabeta, Bulbul/Bible, Sharran/Şera, and Jindires/Cindirês. Among the interviewees were three local residents from the affected villages, including one civil society activist, two olive press owners, and a former employee at a pressing facility. Additionally, 33 of those interviewed were farmers and/or landowners, many of whom served as mukhtars or worked for local councils in the region.

At the time of the interviews, three witnesses were outside Syria – in Türkiye and Germany – while three others were outside Afrin: one in Qamishli/Qamishlo and two in Tel Rifaat. The remaining interviewees were spread throughout Afrin, with some having been forcibly

displaced from their original villages to nearby villages due to the 2018 Operation Olive Branch, launched by Türkiye and allied SNA factions.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic and Kurdish. Thirty of them were held online using secure communication platforms, while the remaining nine took place in person at locations that were considered safe and confidential by both the researchers and the interviewees. All participants were informed that the interviews were voluntary and how their information would be utilized, including in this report. Due to concerns about potential reprisals from Turkish forces or affiliated factions against themselves or their families, all interviewees opted to remain anonymous and did not disclose any identifying details. As a result, STJ has assigned pseudonyms to all individuals whose testimonies are included in this report.

Beyond the interviews, STJ examined a wide range of open-source materials, including reports from United Nations (UN) and human rights organizations, local and international media, as well as videos, photos, social media posts, and other documents provided by interviewees related to the violations discussed in this report.



Image (3) – An exclusive photo by STJ showing one of the olive fields in Afrin.

4. Background

“Spoils from the Liberation of Afrin”.

A quote from witness Hussein Ali, stating that this is how the Faylaq al-Sham described the levies in his village, Jaqmaq Kabir/Ceqmaqê mazin, in the Rajo subdistrict.

This report outlines the levies imposed on the olive sector in the Kurdish-majority Afrin region, located in the western countryside of Aleppo, for the years 2023 and 2024. Farmers and landowners were compelled to pay these fees in order to maintain their orchards, harvest their crops, and produce and sell olive oil. This practice, which has been ongoing since 2018,¹³ reflects a widespread and systematic policy of theft and extortion by factions of the SNA.¹⁴ Osama Hassino,¹⁵ a local council worker in Sharran district, stated,

“Any Kurdish person present in Afrin must pay a tax to the factions; this is the prevailing rule among the SNA factions.”

The systematic imposition of levies has exacerbated poverty among Afrin’s population and further undermined their economic resilience. The region is not shielded from the wider economic effects of Syria’s 14-year conflict, which has left 90% of the population below the poverty line, according to UN estimates.¹⁶ Additionally, Afrin continues to suffer the consequences of the 2018 Operation Olive Branch,¹⁷ launched by the Turkish army with support from the allied SNA. Before the operation, Afrin was controlled by the People’s Protection Units (YPG), a key part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which Türkiye considers an extension of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a group it labels as a terrorist

¹³ “Cultivating Chaos: Afrin After Operation Olive Branch”, Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, July 2020, https://www.ceasefire.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CFR_Syria_EN_July20.pdf (last accessed: 25 July 2025).

¹⁴ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/49/77), issued on 8 February 2022, para. 92, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3963816/files/A_HRC_49_77-EN.pdf (last accessed: 30 June 2025).

¹⁵ Interviewed online by an STJ field researcher on 10 December 2024.

¹⁶ “Hopeful Syrians head home to an uncertain future”, UN News, 13 June 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/audio/2025/06/1164361> (last accessed: 15 July 2025).

¹⁷ “Syria: Turkey must stop serious violations by allied groups and its own forces in Afrin”, Amnesty, 2 August 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025).

organization.¹⁸ The military campaign led to dozens of deaths and displaced thousands,¹⁹ both during and after the operation, as many fled due to worsening human rights conditions.²⁰

For years, the region has witnessed widespread and systematic violations, including extrajudicial killings,²¹ arbitrary arrests under the pretext of alleged ties to the YPG, SDF, or PKK, ransom demands for release, enforced disappearances, ill-treatment, torture, looting, and property confiscation.²² Kurdish residents have been forcibly displaced from their homes,²³ and subjected to policies of Turkification,²⁴ and demographic engineering.²⁵ Additional violations have harmed the region’s natural and cultural heritage,²⁶ including deforestation and attacks on cemeteries and sacred sites.²⁷

¹⁸ “Three Years Since “Olive Branch”: Afrin Residents Enjoy Security” (in Arabic), Anadolu Agency, 20 January 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1/3-%D8%A3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%BA%D8%B5%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1/2116133> (last accessed: 15 July 2025).

¹⁹ “Turkey | Syria: Latest Developments in Afrin District (as of 19 Mar 2018)”, Reliefweb, 19 March 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/turkey-syria-latest-developments-afrin-district-19-mar-2018> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²⁰ “Escalating human rights violations in Syria’s Afrin: 2024 update”, Ceasefire-Yasa, May 2024, <https://www.ceasefire.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Ceasefire-report-Afrin-2024-update.pdf> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²¹ “Syria: Turkey-Backed Fighters Kill 4 Kurdish Civilians”, Human Rights Watch (HRW), 23 March 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/22/syria-turkey-backed-fighters-kill-4-kurdish-civilians> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²² Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/52/69*) issued on 13 March 2023, paras: 86-104, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/010/21/pdf/g2301021.pdf> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²³ “Where is My Home: Property Rights Violations in Northern Syria Perpetuate Demographic Change”, Synergy Association for Victims, 25 January 2023, <https://hevdesti.org/en/violations-of-property-rights-in-northern-syria/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²⁴ “Curricula in Afrin: Between “Turkification” and Restrictions on the Kurdish Language”, STJ, 16 March 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/curricula-in-afrin-between-turkification-and-restrictions-on-the-kurdish-language/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: “Northern Syria: Replacement of Kurdish Landmarks in Afrin, Turkification in Al-Bab”, STJ, 29 August 2024, <https://stj-sy.org/en/northern-syria-replacement-of-kurdish-landmarks-in-afrin-turkification-in-al-bab/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²⁵ “Housing Settlements in Afrin: Demographic Engineering or IDP Housing Projects?”, STJ, 8 June 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/housing-settlements-in-afrin-demographic-engineering-or-idp-housing-projects/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²⁶ “Syria: Satellite Images Reveal Extensive Logging in 114 Forest Patches in Afrin”, STJ, 12 April 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-satellite-images-reveal-extensive-logging-in-114-forest-patches-in-afrin/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²⁷ ““Blind Revenge”: Cemeteries and Religious Shrines Vandalized by Parties to Syrian Conflict”, STJ, 6 April 2021, <https://stj-sy.org/en/blind-revenge-cemeteries-and-religious-shrines-vandalized-by-parties-to-syrian-conflict/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

In this context, while the levies reportedly generated millions of USD for the factions,²⁸ farmers and their families were deprived of their primary source of livelihood,²⁹ as the olive sector has historically been the economic backbone of the region³⁰. As an example of the scale of revenue generated by these levies, four interviewees provided corroborating details about a single extortion case exceeding several hundred thousand USD. Al-Amshat faction, led by Mohammed al-Jassem (Abu Amsha), imposed this levy on families in the village of Kemrouk in the Maabatli subdistrict.³¹

Imad Al-Din Youssef (51),³² owns land in the village and resides in Germany, stated,

"On 25 October 2024, the faction gathered the villagers at the home of the local mukhtar, Haitham Manan, and demanded an urgent payment of \$250,000 in exchange for permission to harvest their crops, an amount far beyond what the villagers could afford".

The levy also targeted Youssef's sister, who tends to the family orchard. She was forced to pay \$9,900 for 3,300 olive trees counted by the faction, which had imposed a fee of \$3 per tree on every farmer to reach the total amount. Youssef added that they were compelled to pay to ensure his sister's safety, as the faction had barred her from returning to her home in Afrin Center unless she complied with the demand.

This report comes amid several indicators suggesting the potential for renewed looting of farmers during the 2025 olive harvest season, which spans from October to December. The political and security landscape in Afrin has seen little substantive change following the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, following Operation Deterrence of Aggression launched by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – now disbanded – and various opposition factions, including those affiliated with the SNA.³³ Despite the latter's announced dissolution and

²⁸ "Afrin's Olive Oil: A Million-Dollar Income Source for SNA Leaders... Levies Burden Farmers and Deprive Them of Their Harvest" (in Arabic), Sham Network, 6 December 2023, <https://shaam.org/reports/special-reports/zytwn-afryn-msdr-dkhl-bmlayyn-aldwlarat-l-qadh-alwtny-itawat-turhq-almzara-wthrmh-mwsmh> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: "SNA factions impose taxes on olive trees' owners in Syria's Afrin", North Press Agency, 8 November 2023, <https://npasyria.com/en/107300/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

²⁹ "Olive picking: A source of livelihood in Afrin", Enab Baladi, 23 October 2024, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2024/10/olive-picking-a-source-of-livelihood-in-afrin/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

³⁰ Thomas Schmidinger: "The Battle for the Mountain of the Kurds: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in the Afrin Region of Rojava", BM Press, 2019, p. 57.

³¹ "The Sultan Suleiman Shah Division Imposes Heavy Levies on the Village of Kemrouk in Afrin" (in Arabic), Rûdaw, 26 October 2024, <https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/261020241> (last accessed, 30 July 2025).

³² Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 27 October 2024.

³³ "Deterrence of Aggression: A Military Operation Brought Down the Assad Regime in 12 Days" (in Arabic), Al Jazeera, 2 January 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2024/11/29/%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86->

integration into the Ministry of Defense of the Syrian Interim Government, declared during the 'Victory Conference' on 29 January 2025,³⁴ some factions have continued their activities in Afrin.³⁵

Hussein Ali (49),³⁶ a former olive oil mill worker from the village of Jaqmaq Kabir in the Rajo subdistrict, confirmed that factions kept collecting taxes at least until the end of January 2025. This included the Faylaq al-Sham led by Monther Serras (Abu Obada),³⁷ a former member of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (SNC).³⁸ This group served as the political umbrella for the SNA and has reportedly considered dissolving itself soon.³⁹ Ali said,

"The Faylaq al-Sham set up four checkpoints and patrols at the junction leading to the mill, with each patrol taking its share [of the oil] from the farmers. When asked on what basis they take the farmers' crops, their response is: 'These are spoils from the liberation of Afrin (referring to Operation Olive Branch), and all of Afrin is ours; no one has the right to say this belongs to me or I inherited it.'"

[%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7](#) (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

³⁴ "Decisions of the Syrian Victory Conference... Point of Order" (in Arabic), Al-Araby al-Jadeed, 5 February 2025, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/opinion/%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

³⁵ "Syria: Türkiye-backed Armed Groups Detain, Extort Civilians", Human Rights Watch (HRW), 14 May 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/14/syria-turkiye-backed-armed-groups-detain-extort-civilians> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: "Violations and Abuses by Turkish-Backed Mercenaries Continue Despite Claims of Their Withdrawal from Afrin", Facebook post, Afrin Activists Network (AAN), 15 June 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/afrin.activists/posts/pfbid024Teq8i2SAni8BDPU9CSWaCbJKXkaije3tKoKMRHQfy7CTsX7oPVJRQqV9SEA2hTZI> (last accessed: 30 July 2025),

³⁶ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 29 January 2025.

³⁷ "Farmlands and Shops: Kurdish Party Accuses Türkiye-Backed Faction Faylaq al-Sham of Forcibly Seizing Properties Belonging to a Family from Jindires" (in Arabic), SOHR, 5 May 2024, <https://www.syriaahr.com/%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%8A-%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AA/712875/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

³⁸ Monther Serras, SNC, December 2024, <https://en.etilaf.org/previous-members/monther-sras>, (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

³⁹ Video on X platform, Syria TV, 10 February 2025, https://x.com/syr_television/status/1889000125101478296 (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

Arbitrary arrests have persisted, with factions of the SNA using them to intimidate the population and prevent forcibly displaced persons from returning.⁴⁰ STJ documented cases in which several SNA factions and their affiliated military police arbitrarily detained residents in Afrin, some accused of ‘expressing support for the SDF.’ These arrests took place on 6 February 2025, following the entry of the Transitional Syrian Government’s General Security Forces into the area,⁴¹ as part of an agreement that granted the government control over the region’s ‘security file.’⁴²

STJ also documented tree-cutting operations in Afrin,⁴³ including the felling of 100 mature olive trees in Maabatli district on 3 June 2025.⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the cutting of olive trees has been used as a punitive tactic by SNA factions against farmers who refused to pay extortion fees, according to several individuals interviewed for this report. Among the factions involved are the Sultan Murad Division, led by Fahim Issa; the al-Hamzat Division, led by Saif Boulad (Abu Bakr); and the al-Amshat Division. The latter two operated in Afrin under the name ‘Joint Force’ and, along with their leaders, have been under U.S. sanctions since 2023.⁴⁵

As Afrin’s farmers await the implementation of promises made by Ahmed al-Sharaa, Prime Minister of the Syrian Interim Government, to dismantle factionalism in the region and restore rights to their rightful owners, pledges he made during a visit to Afrin on 15 February 2025, the factions mentioned above continue to operate with impunity. Rather than being held accountable, many of their leaders have been recycled and appointed to new posts in other parts of Syria. The Ministry of Defense appointed Abu Amsha as Brigadier General,⁴⁶ and

⁴⁰ “Afrin: The Annual Report on Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture During 2024”, Synergy Association For Victims, 29 January 2025, <https://hevdesti.org/en/en-afrin-the-annual-report-on-arbitrary-detention-and-torture-during-2024/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁴¹ “Syria/Afrin: Promises by Transitional Authorities to Restore Rights and End Violations Against Kurds”, STJ, 11 April 2025, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-afrin-promises-by-transitional-authorities-to-restore-rights-and-end-violations-against-kurds/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁴² “General Security Takes Over Security file in Afrin”, Enab Baladi, 2 February 2025, <https://www.enabbaladi.net/738002/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁴³ “Human Rights Organization: Arab IDPs Cut Down 250 Olive Trees in Afrin” (in Arabic), BasNews, 25 March 2025, <https://www.basnews.com/ar/babat/879047> (last accessed: 30 July 2025); See also: “Afrin: Ongoing Olive Tree Cutting Threatens the Environment and Livelihoods”, Violations Documentation Center (VDC), 25 February 2025, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/69305> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁴⁴ Facebook Post, Ahmad al-Barhou, 3 June 2025, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2099984927148071&id=100014097518180&mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=jA5Wg7hTTRGF1an9# (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁴⁵ “Treasury Sanctions Two Syria-Based Militias Responsible for Serious Human Rights Abuses in Northern Syria”, U.S. Department of the Treasury, 17 August 2023, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1699> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁴⁶ “Appointment of ‘Abu Amsha’ as Commander of Division 25 Ignites the Syrian Scene... Who Is He? (Erem Video)” (in Arabic), EREM News, 4 February 2025, <https://www.eremnews.com/videos/jkmdfdi> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

commander of 62th Division in Hama;⁴⁷ Abu Bakr as Brigadier General and commander of 76th Division in Aleppo;⁴⁸ Fahim Issa as Deputy Minister of Defense for Northern Affairs;⁴⁹ and Ahmed al-Hayes (Abu Hatem Shaqra),⁵⁰ commander of the Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Gathering of Free Men of the East faction, who remains under U.S. sanctions,⁵¹ as commander of Division 86 in the eastern region (covering Deir ez-Zor, al-Hasakah, and Raqqa governorates) Some of these appointments followed the violent events in Syria's coastal ⁵². region between 6 and 10 March 2025,⁵³ which notably targeted members of the Alawite community and resulted in the deaths of 1,743 civilians, according to statistics from the independent Syrian Civil Peace Group -Seen.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ "Syrian Defense Ministry appoints "Abu Amsha" as Hama Brigade commander", Enab Baladi, 3 February 2025, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/02/syrian-defense-ministry-appoints-abu-amsha-as-hama-brigade-commander/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁴⁸ "Saif al-Din Boulad... From Defecting Lieutenant to Commander of Syria's 76th Division" (in Arabic), Al-Araby al-Jadeed, 24 March 2025, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B4%D9%82-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A9-76-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁴⁹ "What Position Did Fahim Issa Hold in the Syrian Ministry of Defense?" (in Arabic), Syria TV., 13 April 2025, <https://www.syria.tv/%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D9%91%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%89-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%9F> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁵⁰ "Appointing War Criminals to Lead the "Syrian Army" Undermines Justice and Insults Victims", Synergy Association For Victims, 7 May 2025, <https://hevesti.org/en/appointing-war-criminals-to-lead-the-syrian-army-undermines-justice-and-insults-victims/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁵¹ "Treasury Sanctions Syrian Regime Prisons, Officials, and Syrian Armed Group", U.S. Department of the Treasury, 28 July 2021, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0292> (last accessed: 30 July 2025); See also: "Syria: Damning evidence of war crimes and other violations by Turkish forces and their allies", Amnesty, 18 October 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/10/syria-damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-and-other-violations-by-turkish-forces-and-their-allies/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁵² "Pro-Turkey Military Commander Appointed in SDF-Controlled Areas" (in Arabic), Asharq Al-awsat, 6 May 2025, <https://aawsat.com/%D8%B4%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A5%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9/5139997-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8D-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%AF> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁵³ "Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas", UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 11 March 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2025/03/syria-distressing-scale-violence-coastal-areas> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁵⁴ Facebook post, Civil Peace Group -Seen, 29 March 2025, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02cpVf4gSF8SpfXTCX4kLBUtQRnbPPVGoqTyGZr32FbDx72ZgKutXUsZVH41kxunqcl&id=61571943375811 (last accessed: 30 July 2025).



Image (4) – An exclusive photo by Shutterstock/STJ showing a family during the olive harvest season in Afrin.

An investigation by Amnesty International uncovered the involvement of militias connected to the Syrian Interim Government in mass killings in Syria’s coastal area,⁵⁵ though it did not specify names of particular groups. However, on 28 May 2025, the European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on the al-Hamzat Division, the Sultan Murad Division, and the al-Amshat Division as organizations, as well as on individuals Abu Amsha and Abu Bakr, holding them accountable for serious human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings during the coastal violence.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ “Syria: Coastal massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated as war crimes”, Amnesty, 3 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/syria-coastal-massacres-of-alawite-civilians-must-be-investigated-as-war-crimes/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁵⁶ “Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/1110 of 28 May 2025 amending Decision (CFSP) 2020/1999 concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses”, European Union, 28 May 2025, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202501110 (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

Accordingly, the responsibility for protecting Afrin's farmers from the ongoing violations detailed in this report lies with both the Syrian Interim Government and the Government of Türkiye. The latter continues to exercise de facto control over the region,⁵⁷ militarily through army bases and security checkpoints, some of which have reportedly been dismantled (See the Visual Evidence Appendix),⁵⁸ while maintaining support for and oversight of the SNA factions.

5. Multiple Forms of Extortion in Afrin

"They made him pay \$300 to avoid eviction from his home."

A quote from witness Ubaid al-Sheikh Hassan about the levies imposed by the al-Amshat faction in Kakhra/Kaxrê village, Maabatli subdistrict.

The levies imposed by the SNA factions in Afrin varied in form and scope, impacting nearly every aspect of civilian life, from housing and property ownership to trade,⁵⁹ agriculture, and all related activities like irrigation. In the village of Kurdu/Kurdû, located in the Bulbul subdistrict, the Elite Army/Jaysh al-Nukhba imposed a \$4,000 fee on each forcibly displaced person who wanted to return to the village from Aleppo,⁶⁰ areas controlled by the SDF in northeast Syria, or from abroad.⁶¹ The faction claimed the payment was 'in exchange for not being harassed,' according to testimony from farmer Jomaa Khalil (60),⁶² who relayed information from his relatives still living in the village. The faction was led by Colonel Moataz Raslan, who is also the commander of the 1st Corps of the SNA.

⁵⁷ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, (A/HRC/58/CRP.2), issued on 6 December 2024, paragraph 104. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/pillageandplunder> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁵⁸ Facebook post, Afrin Activists Network (AAN), 15 June 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/afrin.activists/posts/pfbid0uNw2S1JJoSmthcJZZ2BvJiK5gK4PSYj7r82Tx56E285kv8YzF767WEYpRUDfLjJrI> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁵⁹ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64), issued on 11 March 2024, paragraph 85. <https://docs.un.org/ar/A/HRC/55/64> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁶⁰ "Torture in the Peace Spring Strip: A Tool for Persecution and the Perpetuation of Forced Displacement", STJ, 26 June 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/torture-in-the-peace-spring-strip-a-tool-for-persecution-and-the-perpetuation-of-forced-displacement/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁶¹ "Factions Impose Dollar Taxes on Every Olive Tree in Afrin" (in Arabic), Rûdaw, 16 October 2023, <https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/161020231> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁶² Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 10 November 2024.

The new Ministry of Defense later appointed him as Deputy Commander of the Air Force Academy⁶³ Khalil added that the faction also levied an additional tax on property sales in the village: 20% of the property's value for owners living in the village, 30% for owners living abroad, and 50% for those residing in Aleppo or areas controlled by the SDF.

In the village of Arinda/Arindê, located in the Shaykh al-Hadid subdistrict,⁶⁴ the security office of the al-Amshat faction levied a fee of \$100 on each household,⁶⁵ \$200 on each shop, and \$300 on each artesian well, according to landowner Ramzi Abdel Majid (67),⁶⁶ who added,

"I was forced to pay the amount levied on my house to a faction representative out of fear of the consequences. He, in turn, handed it over to the village mukhtar. Each neighborhood had a designated representative to facilitate the collection of the levies. We were given no receipts or invoices, nor was any explanation provided regarding the purpose of the tax."

In a corroborating testimony, Rashid Mohammed (54),⁶⁷ a landowner living outside Syria, confirmed that the faction levied a \$100 fee on houses in the Shaykh al-Hadid subdistrict. He stated,

"Some families have pitched tents beside their own houses and do not dare claim them back, as the factions in control there prevent people from accessing even their own homes. Anyone wishing to return to their property must first buy it back from the faction. Some have paid as much as \$5,000 just to reclaim their homes."

⁶³ "Türkiye Dominates the Military Structure in Northern Syria: Influence in Exchange for Loyalty" (in Arabic), Annahar Al Arabi, 18 April 2025, <https://www.annahar.com/arab-world/arabian-levant/209669/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B0-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁶⁴ "Afrin: Shaykh Al Hadid: Intimidation and Economic Tightening", STJ, 9 March 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-shaykh-al-hadid-intimidation-and-economic-tightening/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁶⁵ "How is "Abu Amsha" Making Millions of Dollars Every Year?", STJ, 30 June 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/how-is-abu-amsha-making-millions-of-dollars-every-year/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁶⁶ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 16 September 2024.

⁶⁷ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 25 October 2024.

Obaid al-Sheikh Hassan (32)⁶⁸ said that the al-Amshat faction which controls the village of Kakhra in the Maabatli subdistrict, imposes heavy annual levies on the residents, including \$300 on each house, \$200 on each shop, and \$8 on every olive tree, in addition to taxes on walnut trees and goat heads. He linked these levies to the death of his brother, a farmer and landowner in the village, saying they caused him a shock that led to a stroke in September 2024. Hassan added that the faction wanted to evict his brother from his home to turn it into a military headquarters,⁶⁹ he confirmed,

“They imposed a payment of \$300 on him so that they would not remove him from the house. My brother was suffering from health problems, yet the al-Amshat faction charged a fee on his walnut harvest, and the amount exceeded the value of his produce for that year, as my brother sold his walnut crop for \$5,600 while the factions demanded \$7,600 from him”.

6. Levies Imposed On The Olive Sector

Olive farmers in the village of Kakhra in the Maabatli subdistrict, were not the only ones facing financial hardship due to levies on their main source of livelihood. Farmers in more than 40 villages across Afrin’s seven subdistricts experienced this systematic looting, primarily carried out by the following factions: al-Amshat Division, the al-Hamzat Division, the Sultan Murad Division, the Muntasir Billah Brigade, the Mu’tasim Division, the Ninth Brigade, the Faylaq al-Sham, and Faction 51 of the al-Jabha al-Shamiya, among others, according to testimonies collected for this report.

These levies exhibited several patterns:

6.1. Levies On Farmers And Landowners Residing In Their Villages

“Everyone wants money and oil.”

A quote by Omar Farid, an olive grove owner, describing the levies imposed by the al-Hamzat Division on farmers in certain villages within the Jindires subdistrict.

⁶⁸ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 25 October 2024.

⁶⁹ “Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in Afrin after 2018”, PÊL – Civil Waves, 24 July 2023, <https://pel-cw.org/en/15563/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

The levies imposed on farmers and olive grove owners in their villages in Afrin included amounts demanded by some controlling factions under specific pretexts, such as ‘guarding’ and ‘pruning’ the trees. Other factions demanded levies from farmers without any justification, differentiating between taxes based on tree productivity, whether fruitful or not, or the location of the trees, whether in plains or mountainous areas. Additionally, some factions required a fixed percentage of the harvest in kind.

In 2024, for example, the al-Hamzat Division imposed what they called a ‘guarding tax on farmers: \$2 on fruitful olive trees and \$1 on non-fruitful trees, in the villages of Khilnaira/Xelnêrê, Kafreshil/Keferşîl, Bableet/Bablîtê, M’arata/Ma’arrâtâ, and Jouqa/al-Khadra in the Afrin Center subdistrict; and Kurkan, Fiqiran/Feqîran, and Julaqan/Cûlaqan in the Jindires subdistrict; al-Taqiyah/Taqîyê in the Rajo subdistrict; and Ali Jaru/Elcara in the Bulbul subdistrict. Additionally, they imposed a ‘pruning tax’ of 2 Turkish lira (TL) per tree, according to five farmers we interviewed for this report.

Among them was Abdul Hamid Imran (33),⁷⁰ a farmer and landowner from the village of al-Taqiyah, who stated that he paid the ‘guarding tax’ under threat from the head of the faction’s economic office in the village, known as Abu Omar. Imran recounted,

“He said ‘you have 290 olive trees and we know they would not bear fruit this year, so you have to pay \$290’. I tried to negotiate a lower amount, but it was pointless. He said, ‘You will either pay, or you can forget about the trees for the next hundred years.’”

Imran added that the faction required each farmer to visit their orchard accompanied by a faction member, who would count the olive trees and collect the corresponding dues. Only then would the farmer receive a written permit allowing them to prune their trees.

Farmer Omar Farid (64)⁷¹ described the situation in the villages of Fiqiran, Julaqan, and Kurkan in the Jindires subdistrict, stating that the faction’s official in the area, known as Basem Khalifa, demanded a so-called ‘guarding tax’ from residents, even though they had already hired private guards for their orchards at their own expense, totaling \$9,240. This came after the faction’s economic office informed them that they were responsible for their security due to the faction’s engagement in clashes with al-Jabha al-Shamiya.

⁷⁰ Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 19 November 2024.

⁷¹ Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 15 November 2024.

Expressing frustration with the situation, Farid said,

"This situation is unbearable. Everyone wants money and oil; from the faction's economic wing to the security office, each one tells me they want tins of oil. For example, there are four members in the economic office, and each of them wants a tin of oil for himself".

Besides the fixed levies, Shirzad Abdulrahman (42),⁷² a farmer and landowner from Jouqa village in Afrin Center, said that the faction's economic office official demanded an unspecified levy from farmers, which he called 'arbitrary.' He added,

"Initially, our village mukhtar, Jamal Issa, called on residents to gather in the village center on 15 October 2024, in the presence of a representative from the economic office, to inform us about the need to pay the tax. I paid \$250 for 300 olive trees, as well as two tins of olive oil and two sacks of olives. I also pay a monthly fee of 350 TL to the economic office representative, known as Abu Ahmed, originally from the Ghab Plain (in Hama), as a tax for my grocery shop in the village. I receive no receipts in exchange for these payments."

Two other farmers spoke about the 'guarding tax' imposed in areas controlled by the al-Jabha al-Shamiya. In the village of Qatmah/Qitmê, in the Sharran subdistrict, the affiliated Faction 51 levied a fee of five TL per olive tree. One of these farmers, Jwan Ibrahim (44),⁷³ described the olive harvest season as 'a nightmare,' explaining that he owns 700 olive trees and was therefore forced to pay 3,500 TL to the faction.

Regarding the collection process, Ibrahim stated,

"The faction collects money through its security and agricultural offices. The head of the agricultural office receives payments from farmers, and if a farmer refuses or delays, the security office intervenes to pressure them. Usually, this pressure involves psychological harassment. These acts of intimidation and threats are generally enough to force the farmer to pay the required amount."

⁷² Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 10 November 2024.

⁷³ Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 1 November 2024.

The al-Jabha al-Shamiya, along with Faction 51, was led by Azzam al-Gharib (Abu al-Ezz Saraqib), who was appointed governor of Aleppo by the Syrian Interim Government on 21 December 2024.⁷⁴

Talking about other villages in the Sharran subdistrict, including Sinko/Sîngo, Qastal/Qestelê, and Baflun/Baflûnê, Abbas Hassan (63),⁷⁵ a member of one of the local councils in Afrin, said that the al-Jabha al-Shamiya demanded a 12% share of the production from each farmer. In villages controlled by the Sultan Murad Division, farmers had to give up 13% of their harvest, including in Kharbat Sharran/Xirabî Şera, where Hassan himself owns an olive grove. Hassan explained how the factions justify these taxes by stating,

"They claim to be military factions with significant expenses because they are responsible for guarding the area, preventing thefts and looting, and ensuring security and stability in the region. However, 95% of the private shops and commercial establishments in the area have been confiscated from their owners, and these factions operate them unlawfully, even preventing the rightful owners from approaching them."

Speaking about the so-called 'guarding tax' in Sahra/Za're village in the Bulbul subdistrict, farmer Khalil explained that the Mu'tasim Division imposed a progressively increasing levy based on the farmer's yield. For instance, landowners were required to give one tin of olive oil for every five sacks of olives harvested.⁷⁶ Khalil added that the faction's economic office was headed by a man named Bilal Mudallal (Abu Rabea), while a figure known as Abu Ali, along with another official from Eastern Ghouta nicknamed Abu Khattab, oversaw the olive sector on behalf of the faction. Despite the faction's presence, Khalil noted, the village witnessed several incidents of crop theft. Additionally, information was received indicating that the faction's overall commander, Mu'tasim Abbas, had been appointed commander of the Infantry Regiment within the 80th Division of the newly formed Syrian Army.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ "Appointed Governor of Aleppo... Who Is Azzam Ghareeb Commander of the Levant Front?" (in Arabic), Al Arabiya, 21 December 2024, <https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/syria/2024/12/21/%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%88-%D8%B9%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁷⁵ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 27 October 2024.

⁷⁶ "Syria: Sultan Murad and Mu'tasim Divisions Pillage the Industrial Zone in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê", STJ, 6 October 2021, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-sultan-murad-and-mutasim-divisions-pillage-the-industrial-zone-in-ras-al-ayn-sere-kaniye/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁷⁷ Facebook post, Halab Today TV, 18 April 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/HalabTodayTV/posts/%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A->

The levies imposed by the al-Amshat Division on farmers in villages under its control varied significantly. In the village of Kakhra, in the Maabatli subdistrict, the Division demanded \$8 per olive tree, regardless of whether the tree was productive, while in Kerzayhel, in the Afrin Center subdistrict, the levy was \$1.50 per tree. This information comes from Howzan Soro (30),⁷⁸ a local orchard owner, who stated that before the harvest season, the Division's economic office instructed the village mukhtar to notify landowners to report to the office and declare the number of olive trees they owned. Once the harvest began, faction members visited the orchards, counted the trees, and issued yellow cards indicating their number and location. He added,

"To collect the money, the faction sends the names to the village mukhtar, who then notifies us through the village's WhatsApp group to report to the economic office in Kerzayhel. If we fail to do so and do not pay the required amount, we will face harassment, and in some cases, those who refuse to pay may be arrested."

It is worth noting that some mukhtars in Afrin were reportedly appointed under the direct supervision of Turkish authorities to coordinate with the factions operating in their villages and gather intelligence on Türkiye's behalf⁷⁹.

Soro mentioned that he paid the faction \$300 as a levy for the 200 olive trees in his orchard, noting that landowners faced harassment and extortion by faction members who claimed to be protecting the land. Soro continued to say,

"The day after the harvest began, two members of the same faction arrived on a motorcycle and asked for two tins of olives. They justified it as food for the fighters guarding the crop against theft. Each year, the pressure increases, along with higher levies and thefts. Farmers have reached a point where they hope the trees will not bear fruit next season."

<https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/8322> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁷⁸ Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 3 October 2024.

⁷⁹ "Türkiye Revives the 'Mukhtar Intelligence System' in Afrin" (in Arabic), Violations Documentation Center (VDC), 8 December 2018, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/8322> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

6.2. Levies on Power-of-Attorney Orchards

"Why this injustice?"

A quote from farmer Abdul Hamid Imran about the high levy imposed by the al-Hamzat Division on lands managed under power of attorney in the village of al-Taqiya in the Rajo subdistrict.

In another form of agricultural taxation, the factions in control of Afrin imposed exorbitant levies ranging from 30% to 60% of the olive harvest on orchards owned by displaced Kurdish individuals, whether inside the country or abroad, who had entrusted the management of their lands to relatives or acquaintances residing in Afrin through official powers of attorney.⁸⁰ Some of these properties were outright seized under the pretext that their owners were affiliated with the PKK.⁸¹

Ten individuals interviewed for this report described the practices of the al-Amshat Division concerning lands managed under powers of attorney. In 2023, the faction confiscated significant portions of the olive harvest from orchards owned by displaced persons and imposed monetary levies on their authorized agents. In villages across the Jindires subdistrict, the group charged \$20 per olive tree in lowland areas and \$3.50 per tree in mountainous terrain, regardless of productivity. In two villages under their control in the Sharran subdistrict, a flat \$20 levy was imposed on each tree, fruitful or not. In Maabatli, farmer Saleh Ahmed, who owns an orchard in one of the subdistrict's villages, reported that the faction seized multiple farmlands under the pretext that their owners were affiliated with 'the Party.' These lands were then reassigned to third parties in exchange for 40% of the harvest.⁸² These actions directly contradict public statements made by the faction's leader, Abu Amsha, who denied imposing any levies on olive farmers in an interview with Al Majalla magazine on 6 May 2025.⁸³

⁸⁰ "Opposition Faction Imposes Tax on Olive Trees in Jachur Village, Afrin Countryside" (in Arabic), The Syria Report, 15 October 2024, <https://hlp.syria-report.com/%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D9%81%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D8%B4%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%88/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁸¹ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, (A/HRC/58/CRP.2), issued on 6 December 2024, paragraph: 81. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/pillageandplunder> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁸² "Five Years of Injustice are Enough!", STJ, 13 November 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/five-years-of-injustice-are-enough/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁸³ "Al-Majalla Interviews Brigadier General Mohammed al-Jassem: Coastal Events, Relations with the Kurds, and the Dream of a New Syria" (in Arabic), Al Majalla, 6 May 2025,

In the Maabatli subdistrict, specifically in the village of Kemrouk, the faction increased the monetary levy in 2024 to \$35 per olive tree in orchards managed under powers of attorney, according to another part of the testimony provided by Yousef, one of the orchard owners. He stated that the faction demanded \$35,000 from their neighbor, who resided in Germany and had entrusted his 1,000-tree orchard to his sister. Yousef added,

"When she expressed her inability to pay the amount, they seized the opportunity the very next day, bringing ladders and sacks, and headed to the field to begin harvesting the crop. The sister was forced to accept the fait accompli, and after negotiations with the faction, they eventually settled on a payment of \$22,000".

In the village of Kakhra, also in the Maabatli subdistrict, a local farmer named Armanj Saeed said that the faction imposed the same levy on inherited orchards as it did on lands managed under powers of attorney; \$8 per olive tree if any of the heirs lived outside Afrin. Saeed detailed,⁸⁴

"The faction treats any land owned by a deceased person as subject to the powers of attorney system. For example, when the father of a family that owns 600 olive trees passes away, his children and wife are not permitted to manage his grove as legal heirs if any of them reside outside Afrin. This arrangement affects many families whose orchards have fallen under the powers of attorney. Family members residing in the village receive their share, while the land belonging to relatives living outside Afrin is considered to be under the powers of attorney system. The faction generally prefers that local relatives manage the olive groves on behalf of those living outside Afrin, thereby avoiding the responsibility of managing the lands themselves and collecting their shares with minimal effort."

According to two corroborating testimonies, the al-Amshat faction collected up to 60% of the olive harvest from lands managed under powers of attorney in the villages of Kerzayhel and

<https://www.majalla.com/node/325477/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁸⁴ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 24 November 2024.

Terindi, both located in the Afrin Center subdistrict. The same percentage was also applied to inherited lands. In his testimony, Jawad al-Hamdan (26),⁸⁵ a farmer and landowner from Terindi, recounted an incident involving one of his relatives, A., the sole heir to his late father’s olive orchard, which consisted of 40 trees. Although A. resides in the area and had contracted a harvester to collect the olives for a share of the yield, the faction dispatched 40 workers during the day to harvest the orchard. al-Hamdan described,

“The harvest filled an entire Honda truck, about 28 to 30 sacks in total. The crop was then taken to a place known as ‘the Hospital Headquarters,’ near the village of Kerzayhel. When A. and the harvester arrived there, they were told that since Ahmed’s father was dead, the orchard was now considered inherited property. Therefore, Ahmed would only be entitled to seven sacks out of the 30. When he refused, they insulted him, cursed at him, and threw him out.”

In another part of his testimony, Ibrahim said that Faction 51, affiliated with the al-Jabha al-Shamiya, charged a fixed annual levy of 30% of the harvest on lands managed under powers of attorney in his village of Qatmah, in the Sharran subdistrict, while applying a variable levy that might exceed 10% of the harvest on lands whose owners live in the village. He noted that another faction linked to the al-Jabha al-Shamiya, led by Abu Mohammed al-A’zizi (named after the city of A’zaz in northern Aleppo countryside), imposed a 40% tax on the harvest from the villagers of Baflun, where only two families remain out of 125 families displaced by the military operation, treating their lands as if they were under powers of attorney. He added,

“Between 85% and 90% of the village’s properties are controlled by the [al-Jabha al-Shamiya] faction. Even residents who stay in Afrin are subject to the inheritance system, where a family member only receives their share of the land, not the entire property, and must pay a 10% levy on the harvest. The remaining share is taken by the faction at a 40% rate, as if the land were managed through a power of attorney arrangement.”

Similarly, the al-Hamzat Division imposed levies ranging from 30% to 60% of the olive harvest on lands managed under powers of attorney, seized some of these lands, and handed them over to third parties. They also applied the powers of attorney levy on inherited lands of some

⁸⁵ Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 31 October 2024.

farmers in the area and stole harvests in other villages, according to three testimonies obtained by STJ for this report. In the villages of Kurkan, Fiqiran, and Julaqan in the Jindires subdistrict, Farid testified that in 2023, the Division imposed a 30% levy on the harvest from each land managed under powers of attorney whose owner resides in Europe. It also seized the harvest of owners living in areas controlled by the SDF, the former Syrian government, Lebanon, or what are called “hostile areas.” Moreover, the Division’s economic office, led by Abu Hamid from Atarib town in western rural Aleppo, made an agreement with a harvester from the same area to harvest the produce on seized lands, refusing to compensate the agents for farming costs, fertilizers, and other land care expenses.

According to additional details in another part of farmer Imran’s testimony,⁸⁶ similar thefts of olive harvests happened in the village of al-Taqiya in the Rajo subdistrict. For example, the faction allegedly stole the entire harvest from 160 olive trees belonging to a woman in the village, even though they knew her husband had recently died and she had no one to depend on. The incident led to her having a stroke, requiring hospital care. Imran added that the faction collected levies of 50% to 60% of the harvest on lands managed under powers of attorney, asking: “Why this injustice?”

Qader Sido (55),⁸⁷ a farmer and landowner from the village of Darker/Dargirê in the Maabatli subdistrict, stated that the al-Hamzat Division imposed a levy of 50% of the olive harvest on lands managed through powers of attorney. He added,

“The justification for imposing such a high percentage, 50%, forcibly, is their claim that the landowners are affiliated with the [PKK] Party or supporters of the former Autonomous Administration. Of course, the villagers were threatened with imprisonment if they refused to pay, and those managing lands under powers of attorney were also threatened with revocation of their mandates and the seizure of the absentee owners’ property”.

Sido added that the faction forced at least three widowed women to sign powers of attorney for the olive orchards they inherited from their deceased husbands and to manage the lands themselves, allowing the faction to take half of their harvest as a levy. He noted that the village is located in a mountainous area, meaning the olive season is less productive compared to other regions, making the levies an additional hardship for the residents, especially amid declining olive oil prices, rising labor wages, and other increasing costs.

⁸⁶ Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 19 November 2024.

⁸⁷ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 12 November 2024.

In the Maabatli subdistrict, specifically in the villages of Sari Ushaghi/Sariya Uşaxi, Hamalork/Hêmlorik, and al-Rahmaniyah/Şêtana, the Mu'tasim Division ended the use of the power of attorney system, which had previously allowed a crop-sharing arrangement where 60% of the olive harvest went to the landowner and 40% to the local representative. Instead, the faction took control of orchards owned by landowners outside Syria and handed them over to three individuals, Sido Boujou (Abu Izzat) from Maabatli, Abu al-Waleed from rural Damascus, and Abu al-Majd, who now harvest the crops under the faction's protection, in exchange for a payment to the group.

According to Sabah Jekar (61), a local council employee and landowner in the village of Sari Ushaghi, the Division also confiscated an olive orchard belonging to one of his relatives living abroad, a property he had been legally authorized to manage, and prevented him from reclaiming it. Additionally, the faction seized his orchard of 140 olive trees in Sari Ushaghi and transferred control of it to a third party, despite his continued presence in the area.

Jekar said he was eventually able to reclaim his land after contacting the faction's economic office and gaining support from several journalists, an outcome that many other landowners in the area were unable to achieve. He remarked,

"There is no law protecting farmers; what prevails is jungle law, the strong devour the weak. These factions have weapons, and they use them to seize people's property and rob them by force. Each faction has its own set of rules: some take 40% of the harvest, others 30%, some demand 60%, and some loot the entire crop. Their apparent goal is to accumulate wealth, perpetuate injustice, and deepen people's poverty."

In a corroborating statement, Mohammed Riyad (55),⁸⁸ who owns two plots of land in the village of Sari Ushaghi, said that the village mukhtar was a partner of the faction and its collaborators, supplying them with information about landowners and their properties. He further noted that the faction's economic office treated the lands of owners who were outside the village as powers of attorney properties, even though many of them were present in Afrin and directly overseeing their land's cultivation. Riyad himself was a victim of this pattern of appropriation: the faction assigned the harvest of his olive trees to a man named Abu al-Majd and his relative Abu Khattab. Riyad recounted his attempt to recover his harvest from Abu Khattab,

⁸⁸ Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 7 November 2024.

"I told him, 'This land belongs to me, you can ask the village mukhtar and confirm that it is my property.' But Abu Khattab replied, 'We were told the owner of this land is not in Afrin. Abu al-Majd leased it from the economic office.' He then said they would continue harvesting the olives, and that I could speak to Abu al-Majd and the economic officer named Abd. I returned to the village and met with Abd. I told him Abu al-Majd's workers had harvested the olives from my trees. Abd replied, 'Of course, you will get all your olives. The grove is yours. Tomorrow, you can pick up your olive sacks from the mukhtar. Welcome.' But a few days later, when I followed up with the mukhtar, he said, 'The man only said that to save face, but in reality, you are not getting anything back. I then approached another man named Abu Husam, a faction official in the economic office, and told him the whole story, but to no avail."

According to two cross-testimonies, the Faylaq al-Sham also took control of lands managed under powers of attorney,⁸⁹ as well as olive orchards owned by displaced people who remained in Afrin but were living in villages away from their original homes. This occurred in the village of Naz Ushaghi/Naza Uşaxi, located in the Sharran subdistrict, as reported by Khaled Mirkhan,⁹⁰ a landowner from the village. He confirmed,

"All lands belonging to displaced or expatriated villagers were confiscated and given to new agents, who could be local farmers or fighters from the faction. The Faylaq al-Sham takes 50% of the harvest, and the other 50% goes to the person authorized by the faction to collect the crop, while the original landowner, living abroad, receives nothing."

For his part, Abbas Hassan stated that in 2023, the Faylaq al-Sham seized the orchards of several farmers, claiming they were affiliated with the [PKK] Party. The faction also confiscated the harvests from multiple orchards in the villages of Dourakli/Duraqlīya and Maydanki/Meydankê in the Sharran subdistrict, arguing that the owners lacked official property deeds. He explained,

⁸⁹ "Sham Legion: Transformations, Network of Alliances, and Its Unique Militarization Model" (in Arabic), Syria TV., 29 October 2020, <https://www.syria.tv/%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A9> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁹⁰ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 21 December 2024.

"These lands are at the Syria-Türkiye border. Most locals do not have green title deeds (official land registration documents) because the government never issued them in these areas. Nearly 10% of residents in these villages had their entire harvests confiscated. It was a deliberate act; they set impossible demands and used them as a pretext to seize the crops."

In the village of Hiloubi Kabir/Elkê, also in the Sharran subdistrict, a man named Manan reported that the group led by Abu Mahmoud al-Safrani, which is affiliated with the Sultan Murad Division, required residents to provide valid property ownership documents to avoid being levied. He added,

"Al-Safrani demanded that everyone in the area provide ownership documents for all their lands. When some told him it was impossible to get these documents from Aleppo, he replied, 'That is not my problem.' As a result, he imposed a 50% levy on any land owned by someone absent, and a 13% levy on anyone present in the area who could show ownership documents."

The Sultan Melikshah Division,⁹¹ according to Manan, took control of the lands of displaced farmers from the villages of Jama/Çema, Kharbat Sharran, and Kobelik/Gobeleke in the Sharran subdistrict, areas it labels as "supportive of the PKK." The group redistributed these lands to local residents to manage in exchange for 12% of the harvest.

⁹¹ "Formation of One Faction and Dissolution of Another Within Two Corps of the National Army" (in Arabic), Syria TV., 9 August 2020, <https://www.syria.tv/%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%81%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%84-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B6%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: "Announcement of a New Division in the Syrian National Army" (in Arabic), Al Khabour, 13 August 2020, <https://www.alkhabour.com/ar/post/973/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

6.3. Levies On Oil Production And Domination Of Sales

"The faction has economically devastated the people."

A quote by Howzan Soro, a Kurdish farmer, speaking about the levies imposed by the al-Amshat Division in his village of Kerzayhel, in Afrin Center.

In addition to the exorbitant levies imposed on olive trees and harvesting, most factions of the SNA exploited the olive oil production market to generate revenue by forcing farmers to press their olives at designated mills, in exchange for varying percentages of the oil, paid by both the farmers and the mill owners, according to at least 11 individuals we interviewed for this report.

The al-Amshat faction imposed a levy on oil production, starting at 3% in 2022 and rising to 5% in 2023, after taking control of 20 civilian-owned mills across eight villages in the Shaykh al-Hadid subdistrict.⁹² According to Haider Taha (56),⁹³ a local mill owner, the faction informed each farmer, through the mukhtar, of the specific mill they were required to use. The faction's economic office also assigned a representative who was present daily at Taha's mill throughout the harvest season. Taha was required to pay the representative two oil tins as fees, in addition to covering his food, tobacco, and transportation expenses, as decided by the faction.

Taha noted that the levies significantly impacted his income, as he reduced olive pressing fees to 5% in 2023 from 7% in 2022. He also mentioned that in 2022, he received only 120 oil tins with minimal profit. He paid the faction levies totaling \$1,500 at the start of the season and \$2,000 at its end. Additionally, he stated that when he stopped operating the mill three years ago, the faction imposed a \$5,000 "damage and loss" fee on him.

In another part of his testimony, farmer Soro said,

"We have reached a point where we wish there were no harvests because the faction has economically devastated the people," referring to the 2024 olive oil production levy, which ranged from \$0.50 to \$1 per sack of olives delivered to one of two mills preselected by the al-Amshat faction in the village of Kerzayhel, in Afrin Center.

He added,

⁹² "SNA factions impose taxes on olive trees' owners in Syria's Afrin", North Press Agency, 8 November 2023, <https://npasyria.com/en/107300/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁹³ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher.

"Any olive owner who refuses to pay is punished by the faction, either through confiscation or by having their olive sacks seized."⁹⁴

Soro noted that the mill owner was required to report the number of oil tins produced for each farmer to the faction, which then imposed a commission on the mill owner for every farmer compelled to press their olives at his mill. The commission, which increases based on the number of olive sacks, is collected and transferred to the faction's economic office.

In 2024, the Mu'tasim Division imposed a similar levy on olive oil production in the village of Sari Ushaghi, in the Maabatli subdistrict,⁹⁵ according to Jekar, who also mentioned in his testimony that the head of the faction's security office, known as Abu Bilal and originally from the Mawali tribe, violated local customs in what he called "theft".

Jekar confirmed,

"It is well known in the Afrin region that mills usually receive 7% of the oil as their share. However, the security office added an extra 5% for itself, making the total imposed percentage 12%; a heavy burden for farmers. It is also common for faction members to respond to public complaints and objections to these levies by saying: 'We are the ones who liberated this land and offered martyrs,' (referring to the 2018 Operation Olive Branch)."

Mill owners faced looting and financial extortion in areas controlled by other factions, including the villages of Khilnaira and Kafrrshil in the Afrin Center subdistrict, which are under the control of the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction. According to farmer Hassan Abdullah (38),⁹⁶ the faction forced farmers to press their olives at three specific mills under threat of having their harvest confiscated. It also levied a fee on mill owners for each sack of olives they received and forced them to buy diesel only through the faction. He added,

⁹⁴ "Afrin: Al-Amshat Seize Around 1,000 Tins of Olive Oil" (in Arabic), Rebaz News, 18 November 2024, <https://www.rebaznews.net/ar/content/%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%88-1000-%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁹⁵ "For the Sixth Year: Türkiye-Backed Factions Continue Looting the Olive Harvest in Afrin" (in Arabic), North Press Agency, 6 November 2024, <https://npasyria.com/196993/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁹⁶ Interviewed physically by an STJ field researcher on 6 November 2024.

"During this season, I took my harvest to the H. Q. mill, which is under the control of Ahrar al-Sharqiya. After pressing, I noticed that several oil tins were leaking. When I asked for replacements, the mill owner told me the faction had forced them to buy the tins from its own supply, each costing \$2, and that they were forbidden from purchasing them elsewhere. He also mentioned that the same tins could be bought for much less."



Image (5) - Part of the olive harvest at the mill, provided to STJ by farmer Hassan Abdullah. © STJ.

In 2024, the al-Hamzat Division showed similar practices in its areas of control, including the villages of Kurkan, Fiqiran, and Julaqan in the Jindires subdistrict, according to Farid. In another part of his testimony, he said that the faction required each mill owner to pay between \$1,500 and \$2,500 to the local council, in addition to a levy of 30 oil tins per season.

In the village of al-Taqiya, in the Rajo subdistrict, the al-Hamzat Division compelled farmers to press their olives at one of two designated mills in the village, collecting a 15% share of the oil. It also imposed a separate levy of 10% to 15% of the oil from the mill owners themselves, according to Imran. In another part of his statement, he said,

"The faction assigned two of its members to be present daily, recording the quantities received and the amount of oil extracted. This way, they calculated the total output for the season. The mill owner told me the faction conducted an end-of-season inventory and collected a tax of 25 oil tins from his mill, and 30 from the other one. This was the 'operating tax' for working under their protection."

In another part of his testimony, Ali, who previously worked as an accountant at an olive mill, discussed the hardships faced by farmers and mill owners under similar levies in areas controlled by the Faylaq al-Sham, including the village of Jaqmaq Kabir in the Rajo subdistrict. He explained that faction members estimate the number of olive trees each farmer has and issue a receipt accordingly, which determines the number of olive sacks they are entitled to at the end of the season. In addition, 20% of the extracted oil is collected after pressing, overseen by the faction's representative in the village, Mohammed Jamil, originally from Hajjan, or by the faction's security officer, Ahmed Jamal, a Turkmen from Tell Jabin town. Mill owners must also pay an extra 2% of the oil to the faction's economic office.

For his part, Ahmed al-Raed,⁹⁷ a mill owner in Jaqmaq Kabir, said his ordeal with the Faylaq al-Sham began in 2018, when the faction forced him into an agreement that resulted in years of extortion. Ahmed narrated,

"In June 2018, my mill was looted; cables, motors, and a separator were stolen. We are talking about equipment that would have needed a crane to move. For three years, members of the Faylaq al-Sham kept asking me to restart the mill. I told them I did not have the money to do it. Eventually, they offered to provide operational funding and gave me \$20,000. Once I purchased the cables and separator and prepared the mill for operation, they demanded their money back. I told them I could not give it to them, so they said they would 'partner' with me. Since then, they have taken 20% of the profits every year."

⁹⁷ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 12 December 2023.

It is crucial to highlight that the looting and financial extortion faced by farmers and olive grove owners from controlling factions go beyond just olive oil production; they also affect their right to dispose of their oil.⁹⁸ Kawa Abdo stated that,⁹⁹ al-Amshat Division, which controls the village of Kemrouk in the Maabatli subdistrict, issued a decision on 23 October 2024, permitting farmers to retain only three or four tins of olive oil for household use.

He added,

"It is strictly forbidden to remove oil from the mills. and if a farmer wants to sell, the sale must be made exclusively to a trader affiliated with al-Amshat. The trader will come to the mill and buy the oil at a fixed price".

In the Maabatli subdistrict as well, farmer Saeed reported that in the village of Kakhra, the al-Amshat Division imposed a fee of \$1 per oil tin intended for sale in 2024, payable at the faction's checkpoint in the village. The same fee was levied on farmers in areas controlled by the faction in the Jindires subdistrict, including the village of Kurkan.

According to another part of Farid's testimony, farmers had to pay \$1 for each oil tin that came out of the mill, and an additional \$1 for every tin they chose to sell to a trader other than the one assigned by the faction for that mill.

In theory, farmers in Afrin had three options for marketing their olive oil: selling it to a Syrian trader through the mill, to a Syrian trader operating in areas held by the former Syrian government or in areas under the control of the SDF, as long as the routes were open and at a shipping cost of \$20–25 per tin, or to a Turkish trader, who offered the lowest price for the oil, according to Osama Hassino. He added, in another part of his testimony,

"In 2023, the Turkish trader used to buy oil from Syrian traders based on a daily price list he shared in a WhatsApp group for traders. The prices varied by type, and he would then transport the oil to Türkiye for the benefit of the Turkish General Directorate of Agricultural Credit Cooperatives."

⁹⁸ "Taxes on Olive Tree Owners and Olive Mills in Afrin" (in Arabic), North Press Agency, 24 October 2021, <https://npasyria.com/84193/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

⁹⁹ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 24 November 2024.



25.10.2023

Dünya zeytinyağı borsaları göz önünde bulundurularak, bölgede ki zeytinyağı alıs fiyatlarında güncelleme yapılmıştır.

BÖLGE ZEYTİNYAĞI TENEKE ALIŞ FİYATLARI

	ALIŞ
Zeytinyağı Asidi	\$
0,10 – 0,49	66,0
0,50 – 0,77	65,0
0,78 - 1,45	63,5
1,46 - 1,95	62,0
1,96 - 2,95	60,5
2,96 - 4,90	59,0
4,91 - 7,90	57,5
7,91 - 12,00	56,0
12,01-20,00	53,0

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Blok: A Kat: 8-9-10 Çukurambar Çankaya / Ankara



Image (6) – A list of olive oil prices provided to STJ by the witness Osama Hassino, bearing the logo of the Agricultural Credit Supply and Production Company (Tarım Kredi Tedarik ve Üretim),¹⁰⁰ affiliated with the Agricultural Credit Group.¹⁰¹

The mill owner, Taha, said in another part of his testimony that because of the heavy financial burdens caused by the numerous levies enforced by the SNA factions, farmers were often forced to sell their oil to the Turkish trader. He added that if a farmer chose not to sell to the Turkish trader, they would have to pay \$500 per month to the local council in Shaykh al-Hadid to obtain permission to export their oil from the subdistrict.

¹⁰⁰ Website of the Agricultural Credit Supply and Production Company: <https://www.tktedarik.com.tr/>

¹⁰¹ Website of the Agricultural Credit Group: <https://www.tarimkredigrubu.com.tr/>

7. Penalties For Non-Payment Of Levies

You will pay, even if you are killed or tortured".

Quotation from farmer Rashid Mohammed regarding the sanctions imposed by the al-Amshat Division in the Jindires subdistrict.

Several factions of the SNA used the abuses they committed against residents of Afrin as a tool to force them into paying unfair levies. They threatened farmers, landowners, or their agents with arrest, which could lead to torture.¹⁰² They also threatened to increase the levies or to cut down or uproot their trees, acts that indeed happened to several farmers we met for this report.

Arrest or the threat of arrest, in the context of levies, was a common practice in areas controlled by the al-Amshat faction,¹⁰³ including the village of Qermitliq/Qermîtlîq in the Shaykh al-Hadid subdistrict. Mustafa al-Barazi,¹⁰⁴ who currently resides in Türkiye and owns an olive orchard there, testified,

"In 2020, we were levied a tax of \$8 per tree, whether it was fruitful or not, leading me to pay a total of \$2,400. My harvest produced 120 tanks of olive oil, valued at around \$2,100. I was forced to send an additional \$300 to cover the payment. When we argued that the amount collected was more than the season's production value, we were threatened with the arrest of my cousins, whom I authorized to manage the land."

Describing the situation in Shaykh al-Hadid as well, in another part of his testimony, Mohammed said,

"You will pay, even if you are killed or tortured,"¹⁰⁵

adding that this is precisely what happened to one of his relatives who owns an olive press in the village of Qermitliq,

¹⁰² "Everything is by the Power of the Weapon", Human Rights Watch (HRW), 29 February 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/29/everything-power-weapon/abuses-and-impunity-turkish-occupied-northern-syria> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: "Arbitrary Detention and Torture are a Systemic Oppression Policy in Northwestern Syria", STJ, 1 February 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/arbitrary-detention-and-torture-are-a-systemic-oppression-policy-in-northwestern-syria/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹⁰³ "Al-Amshat Militants Arrest Kurdish Civilians in Afrin" (in Arabic), Rûdaw, 27 December 2024, <https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/27122024> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹⁰⁴ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 6 December 2024.

¹⁰⁵ "Afrin: Armed Factions Arrest Anyone Who Fails to Pay Extortion Fees" (in Arabic), BasNews, 14 January 2024, <https://www.basnews.com/ar/babat/836314> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

“They imposed a \$5,000 levy on him. When he paid, they changed their minds and said the amount was not enough, demanding \$10,000 instead. When he refused to pay the additional amount, they sent 20 armed men to assault and hurt him. Not only did they beat him, but they also threw him from the second floor of their headquarters, resulting in a fractured pelvis and a broken leg. Afterwards, they forced him to pay the full amount.”, he said.

In the village of Kawa, located in the Maabatli subdistrict, the faction imposed a levy of \$3.5 per tree in mountainous areas and \$20 per tree in flatlands in 2023, according to Behzad Mohammed,¹⁰⁶ an orchard owner in the village. He explained that eight out of 300 families had failed to pay due to the low returns they received during the season. Describing the faction’s response, he said,

“A large military force surrounded their homes, fired shots into the air, beat the women, insulted them, and threatened them with arrest and being dragged by military vehicles if they did not pay. Five families paid, while the remaining three put their lands up for sale to cover the levies.”

On 14 September 2024, in the village of Kakhra, also located in the Maabatli subdistrict, the al-Amshat Division detained at least two farmers: Idris Habo and Hassan Hanan, both of whom managed olive groves for relatives. The arrests followed their refusal to pay the demanded amounts, over \$10,000 for Habo and around \$12,000 for Hanan, based on a levy of \$8 per tree on lands managed under power of attorney, according to two corroborating testimonies from village residents, one of whom was the farmer, Saeed. In another part of his testimony, Saeed stated that the farmer Hassan Hanan was subjected to severe beating at the Division’s headquarters due to his refusal to sign a pledge agreeing to pay the levy.

He was then threatened by the faction’s security personnel, who said to him, **“If you do not pay, we will bring your wife and rape her in front of you.”** When they realized that Hassan did not respond to their threats, they took him to the torture chamber and began beating him severely until he collapsed in their hands. After his health deteriorated, they left him at the doorstep of his home around 4:00 PM, where his wife found him.

Subsequently, Hanan’s wife organized a protest where about 70 women from the village gathered in front of the Division’s headquarters to demand the end of the tax. The faction’s

¹⁰⁶ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 11 December 2023.

members fired shots into the air to scare the women and disperse the crowd, acting on orders from the Division's local commander, Fadi al-Jassem (Abu Malik), who is the brother of faction leader Mohammed al-Jassem (Abu Amsha).¹⁰⁷ According to Saeed, four women managed to enter the headquarters, after which al-Jassem's men verbally insulted them, then beat them with their boots, sticks, and hoses. As a result, roughly twenty women were badly beaten, with four sustaining serious injuries, including Zamzam Mustafa, Jihan Iso, and Najah Jabo.



Image 7- Women injured during a women's protest against levies imposed by the al-Amshat faction in Kakhra village.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ "Brother of Al-Amshat Leader Threatens Residents of a Village in Afrin" (in Arabic), North Press Agency, 18 September 2024, <https://npasyria.com/193297/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: "How is Abu Amsha Making Millions of Dollars Every Year?", STJ, 30 June 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/how-is-abu-amsha-making-millions-of-dollars-every-year/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹⁰⁸ Facebook Post, Kurdish Women's Union in Syria (Hevgirtina jinên kurd li Sûriyê), 16 September 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/hevgirtina.jks/posts/pfbid095ScThDC39bci2xzadmGPGshsV1DXdFVKpMB4Rid1QHJXVMj61n3Vt8pz9JPSvFEI> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

Subsequently, the Division closed the roads leading to the village, cut off internet service, and prevented the injured women from reaching hospitals, according to Saeed. Walid al-Jassem (Seif), another brother of Mohammed al-Jassem and also subject to U.S. sanctions,¹⁰⁹ entered the village, and his men assaulted several villagers, including elderly people and women¹¹⁰. The Division initially tried to depict the events in the village as a minor conflict between two families, one Arab and one Kurdish.¹¹¹ Later, Mohammed al-Jassem visited the village,¹¹² motivated by media outrage and condemnatory statements.¹¹³ Saeed said that the Division lowered the demanded levy from \$8 to \$6, noting it was still "a heavy tax." This was confirmed by another villager, Samir Sheikho,¹¹⁴ who said his wife's brother sold his farm tractor to pay the imposed levy at that time. He added that the Division continued to pressure residents by confiscating and seizing their farm equipment or vehicles until the payment was made. Besides arrest or threats, cutting down olive trees was one of the most common punishments given to farmers who refused to pay the levies.¹¹⁵ This was a hardship faced by three farmers we interviewed for this report, including Mirkhan, who owns land in the village of Naz Ushaghi in the Sharran subdistrict.¹¹⁶ In another part of his testimony, Mirkhan said that the Faylaq al-Sham cut down 61 olive trees belonging to four farmers in the village, six of which belonged to him, because he did not pay the guarding levy. He added that **the cut trees will need 20 years to become productive again.**

¹⁰⁹ "Treasury Sanctions Two Syria-Based Militias Responsible for Serious Human Rights Abuses in Northern Syria", U.S. Department of the Treasury, 17 August 2023, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1699> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: "Who Are the Victims of the Violations Committed by Abu Amsha and Abu Bakr That Led to U.S. Sanctions Against Them?" (in Arabic), Violations Documentation Center (VDC), 19 August 2023, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/64490> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹¹⁰ "Rûdaw Publishes Details of the Siege on Kakhra Village in Afrin" (in Arabic), Rûdaw, 16 September 2024, <https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/16092024> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹¹¹ "Afrin: Conflicting narratives about Kakhrah village incident", Enab Baladi, 19 September 2024, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2024/09/afrin-conflicting-narratives-about-kakhrah-village-incident/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹¹² Image attached to a post on the X platform, Ministry of Defense of the Syrian Interim Government, 17 September 2024, <https://x.com/MfDefen/status/1836101114434875699> (last accessed: 30 July 2025)

¹¹³ "National Coalition Monitors Jachur Events in Afrin Countryside, Firmly Rejects All Violations of People's Rights and Dignity in Syria" (in Arabic), National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 16 September 2024, <https://www.etilaf.org/all-news/news/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%8A> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: "Statement Regarding the Beating of Women and the Collection of Levies in Afrin" (in Arabic), Syrian Islamic Council, 17 September 2024, https://sy-sic.com/?p=9775&fbclid=IwY2xjawFY7iJleHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHXuidj-e9rrm_fyiEwGS6QbBzrmC-TVfKHfdqMmlNXvBgYkmztfNnqlQ_aem_yR48A-jatZZOTnLAhSdfAg (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹¹⁴ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 26 November 2024.

¹¹⁵ "On World Olive Day...12 Million Olive Trees in Afrin Looted by Armed Factions under Turkish Supervision" (in Arabic), Violations Documentation Center (VDC), 27 November 2020, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/41829> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹¹⁶ "Violations by the National Army Militia Continue in Afrin: Crimes of Kidnapping, Assault, and Looting" (in Arabic), Violations Documentation Center (VDC), 2 April 2023, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/41829> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).



Olive trees belonging to farmer Khaled Mirkhan, cut down by members of Faylaq al-Sham in Naz Ushaghi village, Sharran subdistrict.

In the Yazidi village of Fiqira,¹¹⁷ located in the Jindires subdistrict, the al-Hamzat Division cut down 81 olive trees belonging to four farmers in 2022 due to their failure to pay the "tree pruning tax." Twelve of these trees belonged to Issa Manan,¹¹⁸ a farmer and landowner, who stated that in 2023, he hastened to pay the tax of 5 TL per tree to avoid the risk of having his trees cut down again. Manan described the cutting methods employed by the Division, saying,

"The cutting is done by sawing half the tree for firewood purposes, and the tree will then need 20 years to grow back. There is also the cutting of an entire branch while leaving the other branches intact, which has become a common way of collecting firewood used by the al-Hamzat Division. This allows them to avoid much criticism for tree cutting, as the tree just looks pruned or trimmed".

Manan also noted that only 37 out of the original 80 families remain in the village, and that the Division has taken control of the properties belonging to families displaced by Operation Olive Branch, settling displaced families affiliated with them in their homes and assigning the lands to farmers among them in exchange for a share of the revenues. Farmer Jaber Nouri (60),¹¹⁹ testified that about 150 out of 800 olive trees, each around 70 years old, were cut down by the controlling factions across the lands in three villages. Specifically, 120 of these trees, located on land he co-owns with relatives in the village of Maydanki in the Sharran subdistrict, which is controlled by the Sultan Murad Division, were sawn in half using an electric saw. This occurred after a visit from members of the Division, led by a man named Abu Yamen, who is affiliated with a well-known commander known as Abu Walid al-Izza.¹²⁰ They demanded 10% of the harvest as a tax. He added,

"My brothers, my cousins' sons, and I refused [to pay the tax] and expelled them from the land. Their retaliatory operation took place a week later."

Nouri also reported that 25 olive trees he owns in the village of Shorba/Şorbe, in the Maabatli subdistrict, controlled by the al-Hamzat Division, were cut down after he refused to pay the imposed levy. This was carried out by a commander of the Division named Abu Jarjanaz, who is responsible for the Maqla'a checkpoint.

¹¹⁷ "The Suffering of the Yazidi Community Doubles in Afrin, North Aleppo" (in Arabic), Violations Documentation Center (VDC), 7 November 2018, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/6884> (last accessed: 30 July 2025)

¹¹⁸ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 21 December 2023.

¹¹⁹ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 7 December 2023.

¹²⁰ Adnan Khuwailid-Abu Walid al-Izza, Syrian Memory Institution, <https://syrianmemory.org/archive/figures/65b2036ce55c8dacfb40169> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).



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Olive trees belonging to farmer Issa Manan, cut down by members of al-Hamzat Division in Fiqira village, Jindires subdistrict.



Olive trees belonging to farmer Jaber Nouri, cut down by members of the Sultan Murad Division in Maydanki village, Sharran subdistrict.

8. Factions Unaccountable, Farmers Uncompensated

"We no longer have any of our rights".

A quote from farmer Sami Bero regarding the ineffectiveness of a complaint he filed with the military police after his olive oil was stolen.

The violence that occurred on 14 September 2024, in the village of Kakhra, within the Maabatli subdistrict, highlights the state of justice in the Afrin region. Options for grievances were either unavailable or ineffective, and responses to both formal complaints and informal actions, such as a public protest against injustice, were met with repression. No significant accountability was placed on the factions responsible for the violations.

Hassan Jiro (54),¹²¹ a farmer and landowner from the village of Kakhra, confirmed that the al-Amshat Division continued to enforce levies despite protests. He said the Division demanded \$3,500 from him as a tax on his 550 olive trees, stating,

"My son suggested handing over our car to cover the full amount. He now stays at his uncle's house to avoid arrest or harm by the faction's security forces, who have raided our home four times in a row to collect the tax."

In its report dated 6 December 2024, the COI-Syria stated that taxation practices in the region continue to impact the olive sector in Afrin, noting that these practices persist despite the SNA issuing directives in 2023 instructing all factions to stop imposing taxes. The COI-Syria added,

"[C]ivilians in Afrin continued to express frustration over the lack of effective formal or informal avenues for seeking justice or compensation. Many were hesitant to approach local authorities, such as the military police, due to fears of reprisals or retaliation by SNA factions."¹²²

This sentiment was echoed by Mohammed, who described the situation in Afrin in 2024,

"There were land seizures, and some harvests were taken from certain plots. They even loaded sacks of harvested olives onto trucks and tractors and forcedfully took them, right in front of the people and owners. No one can file a complaint. Who would you complain to, and against whom?"

¹²¹ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 15 November 2024.

¹²² Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, (A/HRC/58/CRP.2), issued on 6 December 2024, paras: 89-90. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/pillageandplunder> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

Mohammed recalled the failure of the Rights Restitution Committee, which was formed in Afrin in 2020 in response to rising complaints about property seizures and taxes on the olive harvest.¹²³ He pointed out that the Committee included representatives from the very factions accused of the violations under investigation.¹²⁴

Describing the Committee's operations in Shaykh al-Hadid, Mohammed said,

"The Committee appointed a representative at each olive press to ensure that the factions did not exceed the imposed levies on the farmers. It successfully documented and verified what each faction had collected and even managed to return the excess quantities. However, before the farmers could bring the recovered oil home, those same factions seized it again. No one dared to speak out, and shortly afterward, the so-called Rights Restitution Committee was dissolved."¹²⁵

Regarding the situation in his village, Kharbat Sharran, in the Sharran subdistrict under the control of the Sultan Murad Division, he said,

"In our area, no one dares to object to paying these levies because, under normal circumstances, we do not escape their abuse, so imagine what would happen if we refused to pay. It is certain they would harm anyone who refuses to comply. Here, there is no law except the law of the gun, and the state of emergency they have imposed on the region."

In October 2023, Hisham Eskif, from the Public Relations Office of the 2nd Corps of the SNA, told the New Arab/Al-Araby Al-Jadeed that directives were issued by the Corps leadership, especially in Afrin, prohibiting the collection of any monetary or in-kind payments from farmers. Eskif urged those affected to turn to the military police of the SNA to file complaints, adding that fear does not restore rights or deter those who violate people's rights¹²⁶.

¹²³ "Formation of Two Committees for 'Rights Restitution' and 'Reconciliation' in Northern Syria" (in Arabic), Syria TV., 23 October 2020, <https://www.syria.tv/%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹²⁴ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, (A/HRC/51/45), issued on 14 September 2022, paragraph: 76. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/51/45> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹²⁵ "Two Years After Its Establishment... Rights Restitution Committee in Afrin Halts All Its Activities" (in Arabic), Enab Baladi, 9 November 2022, <https://www.enabbaladi.net/613265/%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹²⁶ "The Interim Government's Threats Did Not Stop the Abuses... Olive Farmers in Syrian Afrin Are Victims of Extortion Fees" (in Arabic), Al-Araby al-Jadeed, 12 November 2023,

Turning to the military police was exactly what Sami Biro,¹²⁷ a farmer living in Jindires – controlled by the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction – did after an armed group in military uniforms stormed his home in 2021. They blindfolded him and his wife and demanded they reveal where they kept their money and gold. Biro recounted,

"When I told them I had no money or gold, they began beating me violently with the butt of a rifle. The beating continued until I revealed where I had hidden the money. They stole 12 tins of olive oil from my home, 200 grams of gold that belonged to my wife, and \$2,000 I earned from selling olive oil from that year's harvest. We filed an official complaint with the military police in Jindires (where he lives), but the case was registered against an unknown perpetrator, and none of our rights were ever restored."

In another part of his testimony, farmer Nouri stated that neither the military police nor the civil police took any action when residents filed a complaint about the cutting of 400 olive trees – roughly 80 tons of firewood – in the village of Maydanki, in the Sharran subdistrict, an area controlled by the al-Hamzat Division and the Sultan Murad Division. He said,

"The [firewood] was loaded onto vehicles and passed through a checkpoint manned by the Sultan Murad Division before being taken to Idlib. After the trees were cut down, we went to the Agriculture Chamber in Afrin and filed a complaint. The Chamber contacted the local council, and the council informed the Turkish governor (Wali), but there was no response".

Another testimony reveals that the Turkish governor was not only aware of the levies imposed by the controlling factions and how they handled their collection, but also actively supported them. In another part of his statement, al-Raed said,

"The Faylaq al-Sham, which controls our village Jaqmaq Kabir, imposes a fixed tax on olive presses, fifty tins of oil, regardless of how much is actually produced. Each village is required to press olives within its own boundaries. I own land in the nearby village of Hajmala/Hucemala, which is also controlled by the Faylaq al-Sham but led by a different commander. He forced me to press at the Hajmala village press. I spoke with

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/economy/%D8%B1%D8%BA%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B6%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹²⁷ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 10 February 2024.

him and pleaded, but it was no use. I filed a complaint with the local council, which informed the Turkish governor. The governor told them, 'Close the matter and abide by the faction's and the commander's decision.' So, I pressed my olives at the Hajmala press and paid both the pressing fee and the tax."

As part of its effective control, Türkiye administratively placed Afrin under the direct oversight of the governor of Hatay Province on the other side of the border, through "general coordinators," who are Turkish officials sent to local councils there.¹²⁸ As the testimonies above show, these coordinators helped create a culture of impunity in the region by ignoring complaints and pressuring the affected parties to accept the factions' decisions. The role of Turkish advisors and coordinators in northern Syria was ended on 19 June 2025, according to an agreement between the Syrian and Turkish governments, which administratively integrated the northern Aleppo countryside into the Aleppo province¹²⁹.

Between the imposed taxes and the lack of justice in Afrin, most of those we interviewed for this report expressed feelings of helplessness and frustration. Bilal Hanan (30),¹³⁰ a civil activist from the village of Abraz/Avrazê in the Maabatli subdistrict, spoke about the psychological impact of the situation on farmers and landowners in Afrin, saying,

"These taxes imposed by the factions greatly affect the psychological well-being of local residents and farmers. This has been an ongoing issue for years, leading to a persistent sense of injustice and oppression among the people. The problem is also connected to how it impacts the farmers' economic situation, as many depend on olive trees in their groves as their primary source of income, especially families living in villages without any relatives or children in Europe or outside Syria."

¹²⁸ "The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies", New Lines Institute, 7 December 2022, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/state-resilience-fragility/civil-military-relations/the-gangs-of-northern-syria-life-under-turkeys-proxies/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025);

See also: "On Its Twelfth Anniversary: 'Revolution' Service Institutions Under the Authority of the 'Turkish Coordinator'" (in Arabic), Syria Direct, 18 March 2023, <https://syriadirect.org/%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9/?lang=ar> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹²⁹ Facebook post, Halab Today TV, 19 June 2025, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0Ai1pVKhDHjy3eefxs1Gd29JPJzs6fgf6bHL2jebYYj8VfSufjUaR6MgJqwMPCy1l&id=100064257056181&mibextid=wwXlfr&_rdr (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹³⁰ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher 26 October 2024.

For example, Hanan discussed his aunt's situation, a farmer and landowner in the same village. He mentioned that the commander of the 9th Division,¹³¹ known as Abu Shadi,¹³² originally from the town of Atarib in western rural Aleppo, told her, "You are stealing olives from us and not paying your share." This happened after she argued with him about the levy, five sacks of olives. He threatened to increase it to six sacks if she continued to object, which made her stay silent and accept paying five sacks. Hanan added,

"My aunt and her husband had already paid three sacks before that as wages for the workers who harvested the crop for them. My aunt told me the story of what happened with Abu Shadi, how he came with six fighters, loaded the sacks into a Hyundai, and then moved on to another grove. She was telling me this while crying, deeply distressed, saying, 'What logic or law forces you to give up five sacks out of a total of just thirteen?'"

Hanan said his 62-year-old aunt now relies financially on support from her children living in Europe and Iraqi Kurdistan, after previously depending on the olive harvest as her primary source of income, until the imposed levies made that unsustainable.

Facing the same challenge as Hanan's aunt, Abu Fattah (76),¹³³ a farmer and landowner from Mirkan/Mirkān/Ĥusê village in Maabatli subdistrict, said,

"I used to live off this land. Today, I am unemployed, and my sons occasionally send me some money. I also receive a small monthly stipend from the Families of Martyrs organization (affiliated with the Autonomous Administration) because my son is a martyr. That is how my wife and I manage our daily needs. We do not receive any income from my land, on the contrary, my sons send money to their sister so she can pay the FSA levies and continue taking care of the trees and the land."

¹³¹ "TV Interview with Captain Abdel Nasser Shalouh, Commander of the 9th Division of the National Army, Discussing the Battle for Control of Rajo Subdistrict in Afrin", Syrian Memory Institution, 5 February 2018, <https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/63d6b36ecf7a9e0001e2276a> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹³² "The mercenary commander Abu Shadi, the economic officer of the mercenaries of the 9th Division in the village of Abraz/Avrazê village in Maabatli subdistrict, imposes levies on citizens for his personal gain,"

Facebook post, Afrin Activists Network (AAN), 15 January 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/afrin.activists/posts/%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8Aenglish-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%80%D9%80%D8%B2%D9%82-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%80%D9%80%D8%B2%D9%82%D9%80%D9%80%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7/552255390768542/> (last accessed: 30 July 2025).

¹³³ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 2 November 2024.

In another part of his testimony, al-Hamdan described the 2024 olive harvest season, stating,

"This was the worst harvest season I have ever experienced."

He noted that the modest returns stood in stark contrast to the high costs he had to bear. From the 25 sacks of olives he harvested, he paid a 7% pressing fee to the mill and 10% to the al-Amshat Division, in addition to labor costs – sometimes paid in olive oil – as well as transportation and irrigation expenses.

He added,

"For every irrigation run in the grove, I had to pay 500 TL as a tax, supposedly collected for the local council in the subdistrict, but in reality, it was the faction taking it."

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.

