

“Why Must I Pay to Reclaim My Own Home?” Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in Afrin

Syrian Transitional Authorities Must Immediately Return All Unlawfully Seized Homes To Their Rightful Owners, Without Imposing Any Fees Or Illegal Conditions, And Guarantee Full Protection For Returning Residents

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1. Executive Summary

In this comprehensive report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) examines the systematic and widespread violations of housing, land, and property (HLP) rights committed in the predominantly Kurdish region of Afrin by factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA) since Operation Olive Branch in 2018. The report draws on 39 detailed testimonies that document cases involving the seizure and destruction of at least 53 homes, as well as agricultural lands, equipment, and other assets. These cases represent only a fraction of the broader pattern of violations that have persisted in the region since its capture.

The violations documented in this report were committed by members, leaders, civilians, and families affiliated with 19 factions of the SNA, including the Sultan Suleiman Shah Division (also known as al-Amshat), the Sultan Murad Division, the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, the Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Gathering of Free Men of the East (commonly known as Ahrar al-Sharqiya), and the Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya/Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant (commonly known as Ahrar al-Sham) factions.

The violations specifically targeted the properties of displaced Kurdish residents, estimated to number in the tens of thousands, who were forcibly displaced during or after the military operation as a result of widespread human rights abuses. Documented patterns of violations include the looting of property, in some cases valued at thousands of dollars; the seizure of homes and their subsequent conversion for military or residential use, with certain factions turning them into military headquarters while others housed their members' families or displaced civilians from other regions with whom they had affiliations. Further violations involved the exploitation of confiscated shops and the destruction and use of agricultural land without the owners' consent, compensation, or participation in any resulting profits.

Many property owners faced arbitrary arrest and detention, and in some cases, torture, either to force them to leave the area and give up their property or to intimidate them into abandoning their claims over seized assets. In one documented incident, a faction threatened a property owner with arrest after he filed a complaint with the relevant authorities, an example that highlights the ineffectiveness of existing grievance mechanisms and the failure of local law enforcement to assert authority or hold armed factions accountable.

This report comes seven months after the fall of the Assad regime, on 8 December 2024, to provide a detailed account of the worsening state of property rights in Afrin. It emphasizes the ongoing presence of SNA factions in many villages across the region, despite the official announcement of their dissolution and integration into the Ministry of Defense of the new Syrian government. The government now holds primary responsibility for ensuring the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of displaced individuals, as well as for establishing effective mechanisms to restore their property rights and rebuild their lives. The Turkish government also shares responsibility, as it continues to support and oversee the activities of the SNA factions in the region.

It should be noted that, despite later changes in the affiliations of the involved factions, the term SNA will be used throughout this report to refer to the political and military alignments of those factions during the period when the documented violations took place.

2. Legal opinion and Recommendations

2.1. From the perspective of Syrian legislation

The violations documented in this report, including the unlawful seizure of real estate, homes, shops, and agricultural lands in the Afrin region; the conversion of some properties into military headquarters; their exploitation or rental without the owners' consent; the uprooting of olive trees; the destruction of property; and the arbitrary arrest, torture, degrading treatment, and extortion of owners to force them to relocate or relinquish their property, constitute flagrant breaches of several provisions of the 2025 Constitutional Declaration,¹ as well as of Syrian legislation currently in force pursuant to that Declaration.

Article 16.1 of the Constitutional Declaration affirms that “The right to private property is protected, and it may not be expropriated except for the public benefit and in return for fair compensation.” Its preamble further underscores the principles of the rule of law, victim redress, and the establishment of a state founded on citizenship, freedom, and dignity. Accordingly, any form of forced or unlawful seizure of private property, whether through its conversion into military headquarters, its exploitation without authorization, or its sale and purchase under coercion, constitutes a clear violation of this constitutional provision and cannot be justified under any security, political, or military pretext.

Furthermore, when armed groups or their affiliates occupy homes, shops, and agricultural lands, without the owner's consent or any legal justification, and cause the loss of revenue, crops, damage to olive presses, uprooting of trees, and land bulldozing, it directly infringes on property rights. These actions breach the owner's legal rights to use and benefit from their property, as protected under the Syrian Civil Code. Article 768 states that “the owner of a thing alone, within the limits of the law, has the right to use, exploit, and dispose of it.” Article 770 confirms that “the owner has the right to all its fruits, products, and appurtenances unless there is a provision or agreement to the contrary.” Additionally, Article 771 declares that “no one may be deprived of their property except in the cases and manner prescribed by law, and this shall be in return for fair compensation.”²

The actions detailed in this report violate various provisions of the Syrian Penal Code No. 148 of 1949.³ Unlawfully seizing homes, agricultural lands, or commercial properties without the owners' consent, whether for use as military headquarters, investment purposes, or housing, constitutes the crime of property usurpation under Article 723, punishable by imprisonment and a fine. Stealing household contents, agricultural equipment, or olive press production lines by members of military factions or their affiliates, especially during or after military operations, qualifies as theft during disturbances under Article 627. Threatening owners with arrest,

¹ For the full text of the 2025 Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, see: <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025.03.13%20-%20Constitutional%20declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

² For the full text of the Syrian Civil Code [in Arabic], see: <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: 10 September 2025)

³ For the full text of the Syrian Penal Code [in Arabic], see: <https://learningpartnership.org/sites/default/files/resources/pdfs/Syria-Penal-Cade-1949-Arabic.pdf> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

murder, or harm to their families to discourage them from reclaiming their rights is considered criminal threats, punishable by imprisonment under Articles 559 et seq., with harsher penalties if committed by an armed group or involving weapons. Likewise, occupying another person's property and refusing to leave despite formal demands violates the sanctity of the home and constitutes trespassing, as outlined in Article 557 of the Penal Code.

The arbitrary arrest, torture, and degrading treatment of property owners, as reported by victims, constitute the crimes of unlawful detention and torture under Articles 555–556 of the Syrian Penal Code and under Anti-Torture Law No. 16 of 2022. These laws remain in force under the 2025 Constitutional Declaration, which, in Article 18, obliges the State to protect human dignity and the sanctity of the body, and shall prohibit enforced disappearance and physical and moral torture. It also affirms that crimes of torture are not subject to statutes of limitation.

Numerous testimonies documented in this report indicate that perpetrators justify their actions with statements such as “war spoils” or “we liberated Afrin; you no longer have a place here.” These justifications have no basis in Syrian law and constitute an explicit acknowledgment of legal violations, effectively replacing state authority with de facto control and undermining the principles of legality and the rule of law. Despite the existence of “Grievance Redress Committee” and local authorities of the transitional government, victim testimonies indicate that these bodies are mostly ineffective because they lack genuine jurisdiction over the factions or fail to intervene. The resulting absence of legal remedies further deepens violations and prevents victims from accessing justice, directly contradicting the right to litigation guaranteed under Article 17 of the Constitutional Declaration.

2.2. From the perspective of international law

The violations documented in this report constitute serious breaches of peremptory norms of International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). In several instances, these acts may also amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, given their systematic and widespread nature.

Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states, “Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.”⁴ Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) affirms the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing, and housing.⁵ Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) prohibits arbitrary or unlawful interference with an individual's privacy, home, or correspondence. Together, these instruments establish the absolute protection of⁶ private property and the inviolability of the home, which cannot be lawfully violated outside established legal frameworks.

⁴ For the full text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁵ For the full text of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁶ For the full text of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

Furthermore, the large-scale destruction or seizure of property without justification based on military necessity, including the uprooting of hundreds of olive trees and the bulldozing of agricultural land, cannot be considered lawful under any legitimate exception. One farmer confirmed,

“Jaysh al-Nukhba/Elite Army bulldozed the entire hill, including my orchard, and I estimate about 300 trees were destroyed.”

Such acts constitute serious breaches of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949,⁷ and qualify as war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998,⁸ if committed systematically and on a widespread scale. These violations also violate Rule 50 of customary international humanitarian law (customary IHL), which binds all States, armed groups, and individuals in both international and non-international armed conflicts, affirming that “The destruction or seizure of the property of an adversary is prohibited, unless required by imperative military necessity.”⁹

The testimonies documented in this report show that owners were systematically stripped of their basic rights through the forced seizure of their property and the demanding of exorbitant payments for its return. One owner said,

“To this day, I have not returned to my home for fear of arrest. I also know they will demand large sums of money from me in exchange for the return of my property.”

Such acts of financial extortion under threat clearly violate international covenants and conventions that protect property and housing rights.

Furthermore, converting civilian property into military headquarters by armed groups is a blatant violation of the principle of distinction between civilian objects and military targets, as specified in Article 52 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions. This practice not only allows for the unlawful seizure of civilian property but also directly endangers civilians by increasing the risk of attack, clearly breaching IHL¹⁰.

Arbitrary arrests of returnees seeking to reclaim property or to file complaints violate Article 9 of the ICCPR, which guarantees everyone the right to liberty and security and prohibits arbitrary detention. When such arrests happen during an armed conflict, they may also constitute war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Victim testimonies show that arrest is often used as a tool of intimidation. In one case, a property owner was threatened with arrest by a faction after reporting the issue to authorities. In another instance, a person who approached the Grievance Redress Committees was threatened with murder and told, “If you do not want your children to be orphaned, drop your claim to your car and tractor. If you do claim them, we will kill you.”

⁷ “The Geneva Conventions and their Commentaries”, International Committee of the Red Cross, <https://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/geneva-conventions-and-their-commentaries> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁸ For the full text of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁹ For the full text of the Customary International Humanitarian Law, see: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹⁰ For the full text of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, see: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Principle 21) state that “property and possessions left behind by internally displaced persons should be protected against destruction and arbitrary or illegal appropriation, occupation, or use.” Authorities are also required to take all necessary steps to ensure that displaced persons can recover their property or receive fair compensation in line with these principles.¹¹ In Afrin, however, testimonies show that displaced individuals often have to pay or surrender their property to return, practices that directly contravene these standards. Additionally, protecting property rights for displaced persons is recognized as a norm of customary IHL as indicated in its Rules 132 and 133.

Documented testimonies in this report indicate that some property owners were subjected to torture and degrading treatment to force them to relinquish their property or abandon their claims. These acts constitute serious violations of international law, including Article 2 of the 1984 Convention against Torture (CAT), which imposes an absolute prohibition on torture under all circumstances, including states of emergency and armed conflict.¹² They also violate Article 7 of the ICCPR, which provides that: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

In the context of international criminal law, torture constitutes a crime against humanity if committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, pursuant to Article 7(1)(f) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. It also constitutes a war crime when committed against protected persons in a non-international armed conflict, as outlined in Article 8 of the same Statute.

The report indicates that the use of torture as a tool of extortion or financial coercion goes beyond an individual rights violation and qualifies as a serious international crime, requiring investigation, accountability, and reparation for victims, with measures to ensure that perpetrators do not evade punishment.

As emphasized in the Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 31 on Article 2 of the ICCPR,¹³ States Parties are obligated to investigate and prosecute individuals accused of serious violations. However, victims' testimonies indicate a lack of effective redress mechanisms, and that the Grievance Redress Committee and local authorities of the Transitional Government failed to provide protection or compensation. This absence of remedy perpetuates impunity, constituting a clear violation of the Syrian state's obligations to ensure effective means of redress for any person whose rights or freedoms recognized in the Covenant have been violated, including violations committed by individuals acting in an official capacity.

2.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, which documents systematic patterns of HLP rights violations in the Afrin region since 2018, including forced property seizures, financial extortion,

¹¹ For the full text of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, see: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/guiding-principles-internal-displacement> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹² For the full text of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹³ "General comment no. 31 (80), The nature of the general legal obligation imposed on States Parties to the Covenant", UN Digital Library, 29 March 2004, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533996?ln=en&v=pdf>

and identity-based discrimination, there is an urgent need for immediate and concrete measures to address these violations and prevent their recurrence. In line with the principles of IHRL and IHL, STJ submits the following recommendations to relevant local and international actors to safeguard the rights of victims, ensure accountability, and facilitate the safe and dignified return of displaced individuals to their properties.

2.3.1. To the Syrian Transitional Authorities:

- Take immediate and urgent measures to evacuate all homes and properties seized in the Afrin region, without imposing any financial charges or illegal conditions on the owners, and ensure the full security of returnees during the process.
- Stop all forced property seizures and ensure all responsible parties, including armed faction leaders and affiliated groups, are held accountable through transparent and impartial judicial procedures.
- Empower the judiciary to handle property-related cases through independent civil courts, issuing binding eviction and compensation orders according to fair legal procedures, while safeguarding the right to litigation and appeal.
- Expand the mandate of the National Commission for Transitional Justice to address violations committed by all parties since 2011, not just the former regime, and establish practical mechanisms to facilitate the return of displaced and forcibly evicted individuals to their homes and properties. This should create a safe and stable environment that ensures the sustainability of their return.
- Activate mechanisms for financial and judicial accountability against individuals and entities involved in extortion networks, and review all property transactions carried out under duress or threats.
- Develop a comprehensive compensation plan to address both material and moral damages caused by property seizure or destruction from 2011 onward, with a transparent process for identifying beneficiaries, scheduling payments, and implementing legal safeguards to prevent future occurrences.

2.3.2. To Civil Society and International Organizations:

- Monitor and follow up on the situation of returnees in the Afrin region, document violations impartially and professionally, and produce thematic reports that highlight developments and emerging patterns of abuse.
- Offer free legal aid to individuals affected, including drafting complaints for submission to local or international courts and providing specialized legal counsel.
- Develop secure platforms for reporting and documentation, both digital and physical, to handle complaints and information about HLP violations. Ensure the safe preservation of evidence both inside and outside conflict zones.
- Conduct community and rights-based awareness campaigns to inform residents about their housing and property rights, explain legal protection mechanisms, and outline ways to seek judicial remedies, using simplified informational materials in local languages.

2.3.3. To International Supporters:

- Condition humanitarian and development aid on the adoption of a clear, publicly declared framework for protecting human rights, including property rights, adequate housing, and the restitution of property to rightful owners.
- Ensure that transitional justice standards are integrated into reconstruction programs, including remedies for victims, accountability mechanisms, and sanctions against offenders.
- Provide financial and technical support for accountability programs, witness protection initiatives, and efforts that contribute to property restitution or the provision of fair compensation, ensuring these efforts are sustainable and effective.
- Advocate for the transitional government to allow the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI- Syria) access to the regions discussed in this report, as well as other areas affected by widespread violations, so they can investigate alleged abuses and submit detailed periodic reports.
- Provide adequate support to human rights organizations that document violations and offer legal awareness to victims.

3. Methodology

For this report, STJ conducted extensive research from May 2024 to July 2025, including interviews with 39 individuals, 37 Kurds and two Arabs, all from the Afrin region. The research covered all seven districts of Afrin: Afrin Center/Navenda Efrîn, Shaykh al-Hadid/Şiyê, Rajo/Reco/Raju, Maabatli/Mabeta, Jindires/Cindirês, Sharran/Şera, and Bulbul/Bible.

These interviewees were either direct victims or relatives of victims of HLP rights violations carried out by various factions linked to the SNA. Many were forcibly displaced from the Afrin region, either during Türkiye's Operation Olive Branch in 2018 or later, due to ongoing abuses. These violations included arbitrary arrests, torture, and other intimidation tactics, all committed by SNA factions after they took control of the region alongside the Turkish military.

Twelve of the interviewees had returned to Afrin, either temporarily or permanently, to reclaim their seized property. The remaining respondents were dispersed across various locations: two in Raqqa, two in Tall Rifat, eight in Qamishli/Qamishlo in al-Hasakah Governorate, eight in Aleppo, one in Iraqi Kurdistan, one in Sweden, and four in Germany.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic and Kurdish. Twenty-one were held online via secure applications, while the remaining 18 took place in person at locations considered safe and private by both the researchers and the witnesses. All interviewees provided informed consent after being told about the voluntary nature of their participation and the potential use of their information, including its publication in this report. Everyone chose to remain anonymous due to concerns about reprisals against themselves or their families by Turkish forces or allied factions. As a result, pseudonyms are used for all individuals whose testimonies are quoted in this report.

In addition to these interviews, STJ reviewed a wide range of open-source materials, including reports from UN bodies, human rights organizations, and local and international media outlets. The research also examined videos, photographs, social media posts, and documents shared by

interviewees, including ownership records that some property owners preserved despite being forcibly displaced during the military operation.

4. Background

This comprehensive report examines HLP rights violations in the Kurdish-majority region of Afrin, located in western rural Aleppo. These violations are among the most widespread abuses in the area, starting with Operation Olive Branch, the 2018 military offensive carried out by the Turkish army with support from Turkish-backed SNA factions, and continuing after the two parties gained control of the region¹⁴.

At the time of the Operation, Afrin was controlled by the People's Protection Units (YPG), a key part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Türkiye views the YPG as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Syria, which it considers a terrorist organization¹⁵.

In its December 2024 report on looting in Syria, the COI-Syria noted that “the property of Kurdish owners was appropriated by SNA members in a coordinated manner, demonstrating repeated patterns of systematic looting and property appropriation.”¹⁶ The Commission has previously characterized such acts as the war crime of pillage and has emphasized that they further violate the right to enjoy possessions and property¹⁷.

Property rights violations in Afrin specifically targeted the properties of displaced Kurds. Hostilities during Operation Olive Branch directly forced tens of thousands to flee,¹⁸ while thousands more were displaced later due to the worsening human rights situation.¹⁹ Over the years, the region has experienced widespread and systematic abuses, including killings,²⁰ arbitrary arrests on accusations of affiliation with the YPG, SDF, or PKK, releases in exchange for exorbitant ransoms, enforced disappearances, mistreatment and torture, looting and

¹⁴ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/CRP.2), 6 December 2024, paras. 78–87, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coisyrria/a-hrc-58-crp2-coi-syria-20250206.pdf>; (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

See also: “Robbery and Looting by Syrian Faction Militants in Afrin,” Rudaw Arabic, video on YouTube, 20 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLb4p0ILZ4k> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

¹⁵ “Three Years on ‘Operation Olive Branch’; Afrin Residents Enjoy Security (Report) [in Arabic],” Anadolu Agency, 20 December 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: 10 July 2025).

¹⁶ Report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, (A/HRC/58/CRP.2), 6 December 2024, para. 87, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coisyrria/a-hrc-58-crp2-coi-syria-20250206.pdf> (last accessed: 13 July 2025).

¹⁷ Report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/43/57), 12 March 2020, para. 42, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/43/57> (last accessed: 18 August 2025).

¹⁸ “Turkey | Syria: Latest Developments in Afrin District (as of 19 Mar 2018),” Relief Web, 19 Mar 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/turkey-syria-latest-developments-afrin-district-19-mar-2018> (last accessed: 10 July 2025).

¹⁹ “Escalating human rights violations in Syria’s Afrin: 2024 update,” Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights-Yasa, May 2024, <https://www.ceasefire.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Ceasefire-report-Afrin-2024-update.pdf> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

²⁰ “Syria: Turkey-Backed Fighters Kill 4 Kurdish Civilians,” Human Rights Watch, 22 March 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/22/syria-turkey-backed-fighters-kill-4-kurdish-civilians> (last accessed: 10 July 2025).

extortion,²¹ and policies of Turkification along with other measures targeting the community's cultural and religious identity,²² such as deforestation,²³ and attacks on cemeteries and religious sites.²⁴ These actions not only continued forced displacement,²⁵ but also sped up demographic change in the region²⁶.

This was reflected in the testimony of Hamid Ma'mo (49),²⁷ a displaced Kurdish man who fled Afrin with his family during the start of the military operation in January 2018. When he tried to return in May 2018, he was stopped at an SNA checkpoint at the area's entrance. Ma'mo said that the checkpoint personnel told him, “We have liberated Afrin; you have no place here anymore,” in what seemed to be an effort to stop him from coming back. He also mentioned that Turkish military vehicles arrived at the checkpoint and told them to go to Aleppo.

In the context of demographic change,²⁸ a report published by ACAPS in March 2021 estimated Afrin's population at over 442,000, including 157,278 residents and returnees, mostly Kurds, and 285,550 internally displaced Syrians, the majority of whom are Arabs.²⁹ Afrin hosts displaced people from various regions, including Homs, Hama, Idlib, Aleppo, al-Hasakah, Deir ez-Zor, and Eastern Ghouta. The area was transferred to Turkish control under a Russian-Turkish agreement, in exchange for the Syrian regime's control over Eastern Ghouta³⁰.

This report focuses on property rights in Afrin, as a key factor in enabling the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of displaced people. Many remain hesitant to go back even after the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024,³¹ following the opposition's Operation Deterrence of Aggression offensive, led by the now-dissolved Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), supported by allied Turkish-backed SNA groups, which ultimately brought HTS to power.³²

²¹ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/52/69*), 13 March 2023, paras. 86-104, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/52/69> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

²² “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: 15 July 2025); “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: 15 July 2025)

²³ “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: 15 July 2025)

²⁴ “Syria: Armed Opposition Groups Dismantle and Steal Ancient Railway Metal in Afrin”, STJ, 14 March 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-armed-opposition-groups-dismantle-and-steal-ancient-railway-metal-in-afrin/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

²⁵ “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: 15 July 2025)

²⁶ “Cultivating Chaos: Afrin after Operation Olive Branch”, Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights-Yasa, July 2020, https://www.cesefire.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CFR_Syria_EN_July20.pdf (last accessed: 12 August 2025); See also: “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: 12 August 2025)

²⁷ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 23 December 2024.

²⁸ “Afrin: A Kuwaiti Funded School Built on the Ruins of the Yazidi Cultural Union”, STJ, 12 April 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-a-kuwaiti-funded-school-built-on-the-ruins-of-the-yazidi-cultural-union/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

²⁹ “ACAPS Short note: Syria: Humanitarian needs in Afrin (03 March 2021)”, Relief Web, 3 March 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/acaps-short-note-syria-humanitarian-needs-afrin-03-march-2021>

³⁰ “Syria: Role of International Agreements in Forced Displacement (1)”, STJ, 3 October 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-role-of-international-agreements-in-forced-displacement-1/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

³¹ “We Plant The Trees, They Cut Them Down: Challenges and Promise in Post-Assad Syria”, Human Rights First, 30 June 2025, <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/we-plant-the-trees-they-cut-them-down-challenges-and-promise-in-post-assad-syria/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025);

See also: “Arrests and thousands-of-dollars extortion targeting returnees to Afrin” [in Arabic], North Press Agency, 22 December 2024, <https://npasyria.com/201009/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

³² “Operation Deterrence of Aggression that Toppled the Rule of the Assad Family in 12 Days” [in Arabic], Al Jazeera, 2 January 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2024/11/29/%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%B9->

Past violations, especially arbitrary arrests and detentions often accompanied by torture,³³ continue to prevent many displaced persons from reclaiming their properties. This includes displaced Arabs like Haitham Hamdan (67),³⁴ a former sheep trader whose properties in the al-Ashrafiya neighborhood of Afrin were seized by the al-Jabha al-Shamiya/Levant Front, led by Azzam al-Gharib (better known as Abu al-Ezz Saraqib), after he was displaced. Hamdan recounted,

“To this day, I have not gone back to my home out of fear of arrest or harm. I have also kept my sons from returning to Afrin for the same reasons, because, based on the information I received, I am accused of working with the Kurds, even though I am just a sheep trader; anyone can buy from me. I also know they will ask for large sums of money to return my properties. Right now, I own nothing. I should also mention that when the SNA first entered the region, they arrested and tortured my sister’s sons to find out where my houses and lands are.”

Hamdan and many others remain unable to return due to the continued presence of certain factions of the SNA in Afrin,³⁵ despite the latter’s official announcement of its dissolution and integration into the Ministry of Defense of the Transitional Government during the “Victory Conference” on 29 January 2025.³⁶ Between January and February 2025, STJ documented three cases of arbitrary arrest targeting individuals who attempted to return to Afrin, in addition to 41 cases of arbitrary detention of residents. Ten of these arrests occurred on 6 February 2025, following the entry of the Transitional Government’s General Security Forces, which had taken over the “security file” in the region under an agreement. Four detainees were charged with “raising slogans in support of the SDF³⁷.”

Only six of the displaced individuals interviewed had successfully regained access to their properties, which had been seized at various times since 2018. Some of them faced financial extortion in exchange for access. This highlights the major challenges to achieving lasting stability in Afrin, as the region still lacks effective systems for complaints, restitution, or reparations that consider its complex demographic makeup and the status of property ownership. In many cases, seized homes were occupied by families of armed faction members

[%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%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: 15 July 2025)

³³ “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: 15 July 2025)

³⁴ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 17 April 2025.

³⁵ “Syria: Türkiye-backed Armed Groups Detain, Extort Civilians”, Human Rights Watch, 14 May 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/14/syria-turkiye-backed-armed-groups-detain-extort-civilians> (last accessed: 10 September 2025);

See also, “Violations and Practices by Turkish Occupation Mercenaries Continue Despite Claims of Withdrawal From The Afrin Region,” a Facebook post by the Afrin Activists Network (AAN), 15 June 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/afrin.activists/posts/pfbid024Teq8i2SAni8BDPU9CSWaCbJKXkaije3tKoKMRHQfy7CTsX7oP-VJRQqV9SEAE2hTZI> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

³⁶ “Decisions of the Syrian Victory Conference... A Point of Order” [in Arabic], The New Arab, 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: 10 September 2025)

³⁷ “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: 10 September 2025)

or transferred to displaced civilians from other parts of Syria who were linked to these factions³⁸.

The HLP rights violations described in this report were carried out by several factions, including the Sultan Murad Division, led by Fahim Issa; the al-Hamzat Division, led by Sayf al-Din Bulad (better known as Sayf Abu Bakr); and the al-Amshat Division. The last two operated in Afrin under the name of the “Joint Force.” Both divisions, along with their leaders, have been on the U.S. sanctions list since 2023.³⁹ Additionally, the Ahrar al-Sharqiya, led by Ahmad al-Hayes (better known as Abu Hatem Shaqra),⁴⁰ was also involved in these violations and is similarly sanctioned by the U.S.⁴¹.

HLP rights violations are a recurring practice among these factions. STJ has previously documented similar patterns in areas seized by Türkiye in 2019, including Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî during Operation Peace Spring,⁴² as well as in Manbij and its surrounding countryside, which were taken over by the SNA during Operation Dawn of Freedom, launched on 30 November 2024⁴³.

Despite promises by Ahmed al-Sharaa, head of the interim government, to end factionalism in Afrin and restore property rights to rightful owners, made during his visit to Afrin on 15 February 2015, the factions, as mentioned earlier, remain active and largely enjoy impunity. Leaders of these factions have been reassigned and granted official positions in other parts of Syria: Brigadier General Mohammed al-Jassem (better known as Abu Amsha),⁴⁴ was appointed commander of the 62nd Division in Hama;⁴⁵ Brigadier General Sayf al-Din Bulad was appointed commander of the 76th Division in Aleppo;⁴⁶ Fahim Issa was appointed Assistant Minister of

³⁸ “Syria: Turkey-Backed Groups Seizing Property”, Human Rights Watch, 14 June 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/14/syria-turkey-backed-groups-seizing-property> (last accessed: 10 September 2025); See also: “‘Five Years of Injustice are Enough!’ Investigative Study on Violations Against Kurds and Yazidis in Northern Syria”, STJ, 13 November 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/five-years-of-injustice-are-enough/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

³⁹ “Treasury Sanctions Two Syria-Based Militias Responsible for Serious Human Rights Abuses in Northern Syria”, The U.S. Department of the Treasury, 17 August 2023, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1699> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁴⁰ “Appointing War Criminals to Lead the Syrian Army Undermines Justice and Insults Victims”, Synergy Association for Victims, 7 May 2025, <https://hevdesti.org/en/appointing-war-criminals-to-lead-the-syrian-army-undermines-justice-and-insults-victims/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

⁴¹ “Treasury Sanctions Syrian Regime Prisons, Officials, and Syrian Armed Group”, The U.S. Department of the Treasury, 28 July 2021, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0292> (last accessed: 15 July 2025);

See also: “Syria: Damning evidence of war crimes and other violations by Turkish forces and their allies”, Amnesty International, 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: 15 July 2025)

⁴² “My Entire Life Savings Vanished Overnight”: Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in “Peace Spring” Strip”, STJ, 22 October 2024, <https://stj-sy.org/en/my-entire-life-savings-vanished-overnight-housing-land-and-property-rights-violations-in-peace-spring-strip/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

⁴³ “We Will Kill You Wherever You Go”: Violations Committed during SNA-Led Operation Dawn of Freedom”, STJ, 9 May 2025, <https://stj-sy.org/en/we-will-kill-you-wherever-you-go-violations-committed-during-sna-led-operation-dawn-of-freedom/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

⁴⁴ “Appointment of ‘Abu Amsha’ as commander of the 25th Division ignites the Syrian scene... Who is he? (Video)”, Erem News, 4 February 2025, <https://www.erenews.com/videos/jkmdfdi> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

⁴⁵ “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: 15 July 2025)

⁴⁶ “Sayf al-Din Bulad: From a Defecting Regime Lieutenant to Commander of the 76th Division in the Syrian Army” [in Arabic], The New Arab, 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->

Defense for Northern Affairs;⁴⁷ and Ahmad al-Hayes was appointed commander of the 86th Division in the Eastern Region,⁴⁸ covering Deir ez-Zor, al-Hasakah, and Raqqa governorates⁴⁹.

Some of these appointments occurred following the violence in the coastal region between 6 and 10 March 2025,⁵⁰ which specifically 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 -Seen⁵¹.

On 28 May 2025, the European Union imposed sanctions on the al-Hamzat Division, the Sultan Murad Division, and the al-Amshat Division as entities,⁵² as well as on Mohammed al-Jassem and Sayf al-Din Bulad as individuals, holding them responsible for serious human rights violations, including arbitrary killings during the violence in the coastal region⁵³.

Accordingly, the responsibility for protecting the people of Afrin, including those currently in the region and those seeking to return, as well as for ensuring that those who remain outside can do so voluntarily, safely, and with dignity, lies with both the Transitional Government and the Turkish Government. This includes guaranteeing that returnees regain their rights or receive fair compensation to rebuild their lives. Türkiye continues to maintain effective control in the region (see the visual evidence appendix),⁵⁴ militarily through army bases and security checkpoints, some of which have reportedly only been partially dismantled,⁵⁵ while also supporting and supervising factions of the SNA. This occurs despite the 19 June 2025 agreement with the Transitional Government, which called for the administrative annexation

[%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: 15 July 2025)

⁴⁷ "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: 15 July 2025)

⁴⁸ "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: 15 July 2025)

⁴⁹ "Turkey-Aligned Military Figure Appointed as Commander in SDF-Held 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: 15 July 2025)

⁵⁰ "Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas", UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 11 March 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2025/03/syria-distressing-scale-violence-coastal-areas> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

⁵¹ Facebook post by Seen for Civil Peace dated 29 March 2025, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02cpVf4gSF8SpfXTCX4kLBuTQRnbPPVGoqTyGZr32FbDx72ZgKutXUsZVH41kxunqcl&id=61571943375811 (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

⁵² "Syrian forces massacred 1,500 Alawites. The chain of command led to Damascus", Reuters, 30 June 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/syrian-forces-massacred-1500-alawites-chain-command-led-damascus-2025-06-30/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

⁵³ "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: 15 July 2025)

⁵⁴ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/CRP.2), 6 December 2024, para. 104. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/pillageandplunder> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

⁵⁵ Facebook post by the AAN dated 15 June 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/afrin.activists/posts/pfbid0uNw2S1JJoSmthcJZZ2BvJiK5gK4PSYj7r82Tx56E285kv8YzF767WEYpRUDfLjJrI> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

of the northern Aleppo countryside, including Afrin, to the governorate, and for the cessation of the role of Turkish advisors and coordinators.⁵⁶ Since 2018, Türkiye has administered Afrin through direct supervision by the governor of its Hatay province across the border, using Turkish “general coordinators” assigned to the locally established councils,⁵⁷ created by Türkiye⁵⁸.

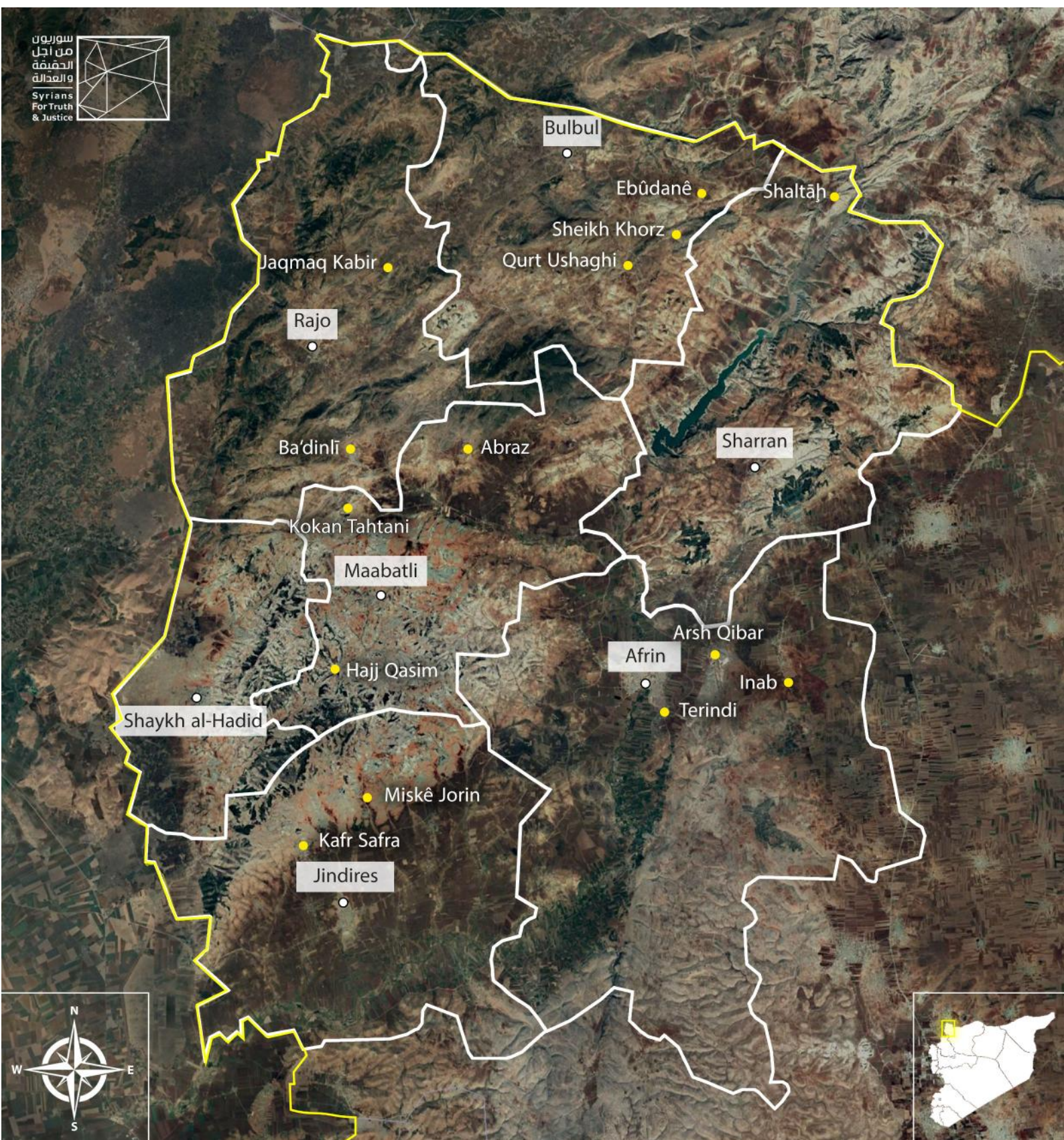
Figure (1) below shows a map created by STJ shows the Afrin region with its seven subdistricts, the villages where the violations documented in this report occurred, and the locations of several Turkish military centers and bases in the area.

⁵⁶ Facebook post by Halab Today TV dated 19 June 2025, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0Ai1pVKhDHjy3eefxs1Gd29JPJzs6fgf6bHL2jebYYjJ8VfSufjUaR6MgJqWMPCy1l&id=100064257056181&mibextid=wwXlfr&_rd=1 (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁵⁷ "The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies", New Lines Institute, December 2022, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/state-resilience-fragility/civil-military-relations/the-gangs-of-northern-syria-life-under-turkeys-proxies/> (last accessed: 12 August 2025);

See also: "On Its Twelfth Anniversary: The Revolution's Service Institutions Under the Authority of the Turkish Coordinator", Syria Direct, 18 March 2023, <https://syriadirect.org/ar/%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: 12 August 2025)

⁵⁸ "Interim local council established in Syria's Afrin", Anadolu Agency, 12 April 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/interim-local-council-established-in-syria-s-afrin/1116152> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)



5. Patterns of HLP Violations in Afrin

Through the 39 interviews conducted, STJ documented violations affecting at least 53 homes, 20 shops and commercial properties, including olive mills, as well as 27 agricultural plots, some of which contained nearly 11,000 olive trees, in addition to a wide range of agricultural and industrial equipment and private vehicles.

Regarding the actors involved in the violations, interviewees pointed to members, commanders, civilians, and families affiliated with numerous factions of the SNA. These include the al-Amshat Division, the Sultan Murad Division, the al-Hamzat Division, the al-Mu'tasim Division (formerly the al-Mu'tasim Billah Division), and the al-Muntasir Billah Division, as well as the 112th Brigade, Samarkand Brigade, al-Waqas Brigade, and al-Shamal Brigade-9th Division. They also cited factions such as Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Nour al-Din al-Zenki, Muhammad al-Fateh, Ahrar al-Sham, Suqour al-Shamal, and al-Shaitat, as well as the Faylaq al-Sham/Sham Legion, the al-Jabha al-Shamiya, the Jaysh al-Islam/Army of Islam, and the Jaysh al-Nukhba. Some victims also referred to these perpetrators collectively as the Free Syrian Army, the name used by many of these factions before they were unified under the banner of the SNA,

The HLP violations in Afrin fell into the following patterns:

5.1. Destruction and looting

Destruction and looting of property in Afrin peaked during the military operation, but it did not stop after Turkish forces and allied SNA took control of the area.⁵⁹ This was reflected in the testimonies of 11 individuals interviewed for this report. One of them, Ahmad Alloush (58),⁶⁰ a Kurdish farmer displaced to Aleppo, said that Turkish shelling during the operation hit his home in the village of Qurt Ushaghi/Qurta Uşaxi in Bulbul subdistrict, leaving a large hole in the roof. The house was also looted when SNA factions entered the village, stealing furniture, windows, and doors.

Figure (2) below shows the geographic coordinates of the house ([36.720302, 36.846512](#)) along with two photos of it. One of these photos displays part of the damage caused by shelling. STJ obtained these photos from the victim, Ahmad Alloush.

⁵⁹ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/39/65), 12 September 2018, para. 17, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/39/65> (last accessed: 12 August 2025); See also: "Housing, Land and Property Rights Violations in Afrin after 2018", PÊL- Civil Waves, 30 July 2023, <https://pel-cw.org/en/15563/> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁶⁰ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 9 April 2025.



Turkish shelling also hit an olive mill owned by the Alloush family in the same village, destroying large parts of it before it was looted. Alloush explained that the mill had been equipped with modern production lines and olive-pressing machinery, he explained,

“We had brought in the latest German-made pressing machines. We purchased that line alone for 40,000 euros. When the mill was appraised for inheritance distribution, its value was estimated at 1.3 million dollars. Later, these factions stole the machines and production lines, then completely destroyed the facility. They did not stop there; they even turned it into a military headquarters for the Sultan Murad Division.”

According to Alloush, the Sultan Murad Division was still occupying the mill at the time of the interview, on 9 April 2025, as he observed during his brief visit to the village after the regime's fall. He said that the division's local official was a man known as Abu Saeed, originally from the village of Kisin in Homs Governorate. He added that the division had bulldozed 50 olive trees surrounding the facility.

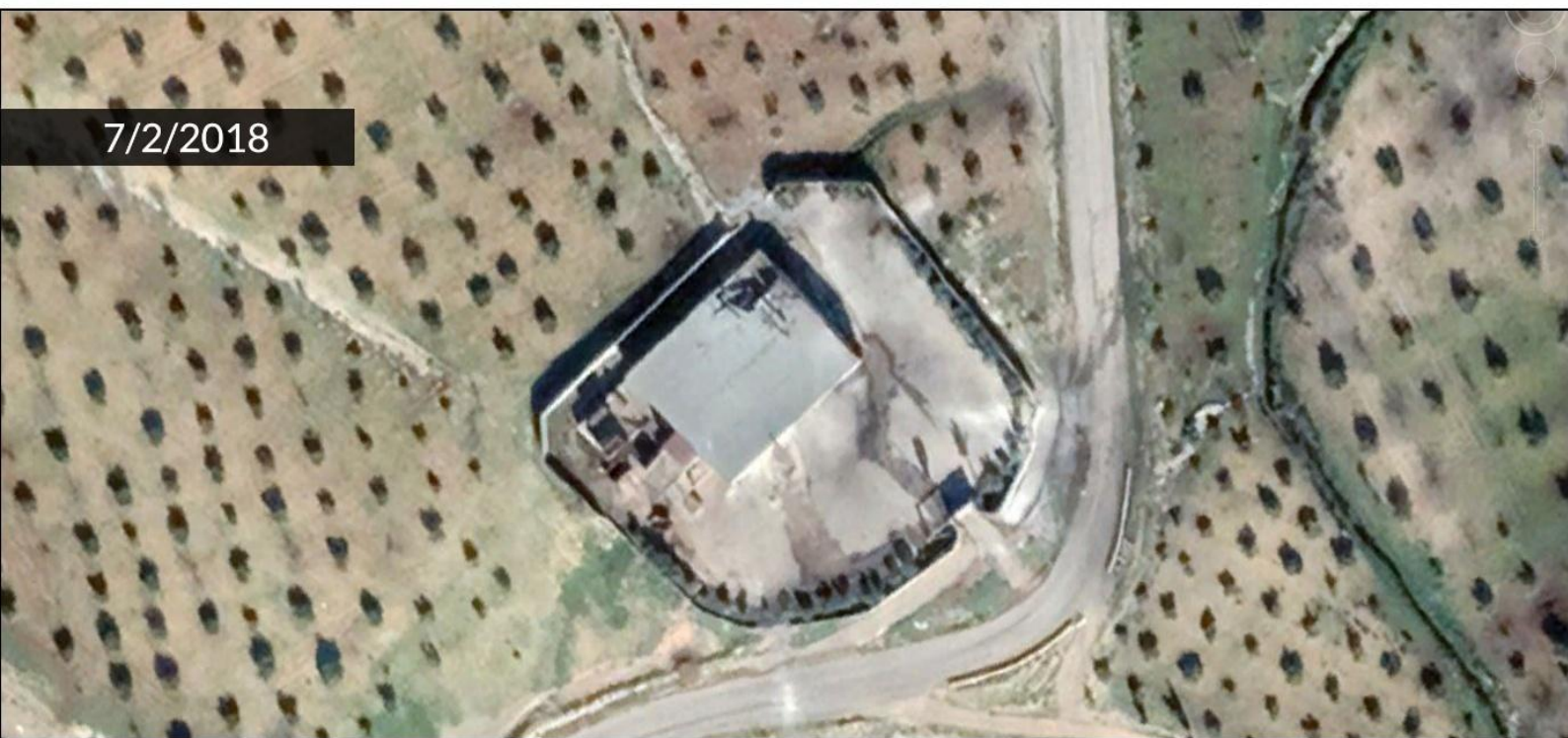
Figure (3) below shows the location of the olive mill (coordinates: [36.722144](#), [36.858317](#)), along with a recent photo of the facility obtained by STJ from the victim, Ahmad Alloush, and another photo depicting members of the al-Furqan Brigade, a subgroup affiliated with the Sultan Murad Division, gathered at the site.⁶¹

⁶¹ "The Revolutionary Liberation Organization, Sultan Murad Division, al-Furqan Brigade, video posted on YouTube, 24 May 2022, <https://youtu.be/GoR5-nVc4Kw?si=I0kXXoL6cgMUEwqi>



29/1/2018

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



24/4/2018



Figure (4) above combines three satellite images of the olive mill owned by the victim, Ahmad Alloush, showing the extent of the damage it sustained between 29 January and 24 April 2018.

Image (5) below combines a satellite image of the olive mill dated 20 March 2022 with a live photo showing fighters from the al-Furqan Brigade, affiliated with the Sultan Murad Division, inside the facility⁶².

⁶² Ibid.

3/20/22



20/3/2022

Image © 2023 CNES / Airbus



Imagery Date: 3/20/2022 36°43'21.61"N 46°45'10.54"E Alt: 126.61m



VideoCook

Alloush added that the factions uprooted approximately 150 olive trees from his orchard in the village of Qurt Ushaghi in the Bulbul subdistrict, simply because it was next to one of their camps they had established after taking control of the area. According to visual evidence analysis conducted by STJ's digital analysis expert, there was a headquarters of the Suqour al-Shamal Brigade located about 210 meters from the orchard in question.⁶³ The brigade was disbanded in October 2024 and had been led by Hassan Haj Ali (better known as Hassan Khairiya), with the Bulbul subdistrict being one of its areas of presence in Afrin⁶⁴.



Figure (6) Hassan Haj Ali (better known as Hassan Khairiya), former commander of the Suqour al-Shamal Brigade.⁶⁵

Figure (7) below shows the geographic location (coordinates: [36.723349](#), [36.866868](#)) of the orchard linked with a photo of trees at the site, obtained by STJ from the victim Ahmad Alloush .

⁶³ "Afrin: Northern Hawks Brigade Evicts IDPs from Confiscated Homes", STJ, 26 September 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-northern-hawks-brigade-evicts-idps-from-confiscated-homes/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁶⁴ "Dismantling Suqour al-Shamal Brigade in Northern Syria... A Turkish Decision?", The New Arab, 19 October 2024, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A5%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B5%D9%82%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A> (last accessed: 10 September 2025); See also: "In the Absence of Accountability: Torture as a Systematic Policy in Northern Syria", STJ, 26 June 2024, <https://stj-sy.org/en/in-the-absence-of-accountability-torture-as-a-systematic-policy-in-northern-syria/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁶⁵ "Syrian National Army || Suqour al-Shamal Brigade: An Overview of the Brigade's Commander (Hassan Khairiya), Suqour al-Shamal Brigade, video posted on YouTube, 28 July 2018, <https://youtu.be/cYhXwVY1MiM?si=3pnk60bSDclhwG17> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

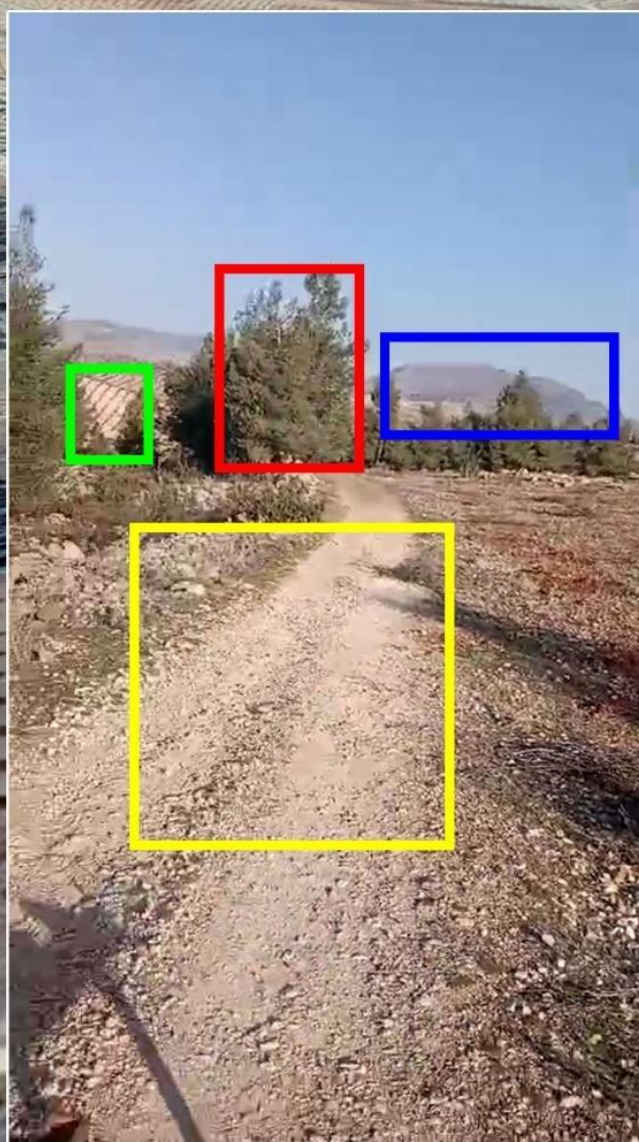
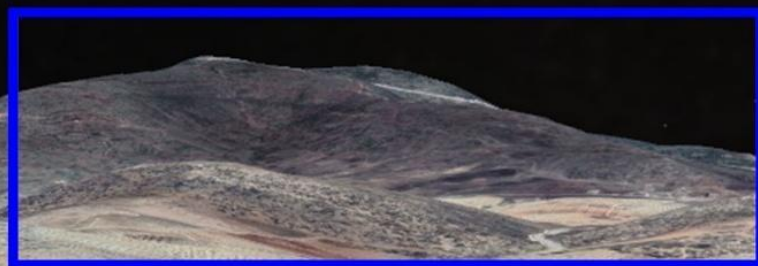
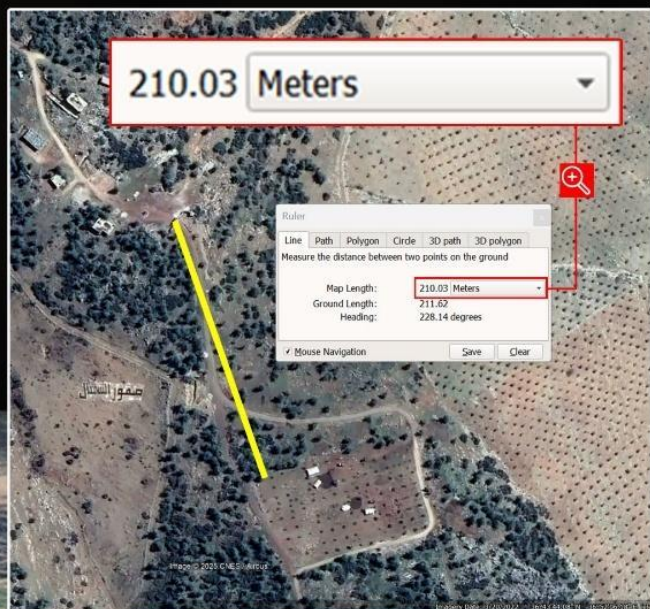
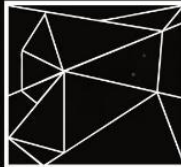
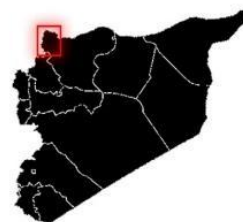


Image © 2025 CNES / Airbus
Image Landsat / Copernicus



Similarly, Walid Youssef (66),⁶⁶ a Kurdish farmer displaced to Aleppo, reported that his home in the village of Sheikh Khawrz/Şêxorz in Bulbul subdistrict was hit by several Turkish shells, causing extensive damage. Afterwards, SNA factions looted all its contents, including furniture from three houses, furniture his son and daughter had moved from Aleppo to the village before the Afrin offensive, as well as about 15 goats, 20 chickens, 90 tins of olive oil, a motorcycle, and a tractor with attachments. Youssef blamed the looting on the Suqour al-Shamal Brigade and the Jaysh al-Nukhba,⁶⁷ noting that their local commander in the village was a man from Hama known as Abu al-Sheikh, while overall command was held by Colonel Mu'taz Raslan, leader of the 1st Corps of the SNA, who had also been appointed deputy commander of the Air Force College by the new Ministry of Defense⁶⁸.

Figure (8) below links the geographic location (coordinates: [36.733091](#), [36.881563](#)) of the house with two photos showing the extent of the damage it sustained from the shelling, obtained by STJ from the victim, Walid Youssef.

⁶⁶ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 4 April 2025.

⁶⁷ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/39/65), 12 September 2018, para. 15, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/39/65> (last accessed: 10 September 2025);

See also: "Afrin: 43 Arrested by the National Army in April 2020", STJ, 20 May 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-43-arrested-by-the-national-army-in-april-2020/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁶⁸ "Turkey Dominates the Military Structure in Northern Syria: Influence in Exchange for Loyalty" [in Arabic], An-Nahar, 18 May 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: 10 September 2025)



In the context of destruction, Youssef also reported that, after three years of control over the village, the factions looted and destroyed an olive mill next to his home, which he had inherited with his siblings from their father.

He added,

“They even stole the concrete blocks, and the mill was leveled to the ground.”

Youssef noted that he had been unable to recover any of his property as of the interview on 4 April 2025, due to the presence of a Turkish base approximately 100 meters from his home. Through visual evidence analysis, STJ identified a location near the mill but could not determine which party controlled it or whether it was a military or security site.

Figure (9) below combines two satellite images of the olive mill (coordinates: [36.733379, 36.882446](#)), showing that the facility was completely destroyed. The images were taken on 28 October 2019, and 20 March 2022.

9/2019

28/9/2019

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



Image © 2020 Maxar Technologies

Imagery Date: 9/28/2019 36°44'00.45" N 36°52'56.78" E

3/2022

20/3/2022

Image © 2020 CNES / Airbus

Imagery Date: 3/20/2022 36°44'00.45" N 36°52'56.78" E





Figure (10) The checkpoint mentioned above, marked within the yellow square (coordinates: [36.731578](#), [36.878489](#)).

Mahmoud Horo (55),⁶⁹ a Kurdish furniture carpenter forced to move to Qamishli/Qamishlo, described how neighbors saw his home in the village of Abboudan/Ebûdanê in Bulbul subdistrict. They told him, “The house has no windows or doors. It is as if you never lived in it.” The house suffered severe damage at the hands of a civilian family from Idlib, who destroyed the back wall and built a barn in the nearby field. Horo believes that the family, who still live in the house, is linked to one of the factions that controlled the village, including the Jaysh al-Nukhba. He mentioned that he finished building the house in 2016 at a cost of \$40,000 and that it was completely looted, with stolen items valued at about \$3,500. Besides his own belongings, the house held furniture from three of his relatives’ homes.

⁶⁹ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 25 October 2024.

Murad Khalil (60),⁷⁰ a lawyer living in Germany, estimated the value of items stolen from his home in the village of Ba'dinli/Be'dīna in Rajo subdistrict at \$50,000. He learned from his neighbors that the house had been seized by a military official from the 112th Brigade,⁷¹ named Abbas al-Hamad, also known as al-Abbas, originally from the village of Sarjah in Idlib,⁷² under the pretext of the owner's "affiliation with the previous Autonomous Administration".

Riber Qasim (50),⁷³ a Kurdish clothing merchant displaced to Aleppo, reported that the Suqour al-Shamal faction, led by a man known as Abu Talal,⁷⁴ looted items from his home in the village of Sheikh Khawrz in the Bulbul subdistrict that he described as "irreplaceable." These included over a hundred-year-old glassware and copperware, traditional clothing belonging to his ancestors, several sewing machines, a tractor with attachments, and a car owned by his sister.

5.2. Seizure and unauthorized use of property

In addition to looting, seizing homes and businesses was among the most common practices of SNA factions. These factions used seized houses as military headquarters, housed their fighters and their families or displaced families from other parts of Syria, rented them out, sold them to third parties, or took over and operated businesses,⁷⁵ according to the testimonies of 12 individuals interviewed for this report. One of them, Hamdan, said that a unit of the al-Jabha al-Shamiya, known as the Abu Muhanna Group, had taken over two of his homes in the al-Ashrafiya neighborhood of Afrin city.

Talking about his first home, Hamdan said,

"They sold my house to someone else in their group, and that person told my sister that when he bought it, the house was completely empty and had no furniture or anything else." The group had looted the entire contents of the house, along with 300 sheep, 60 tons of fodder, three generators, and three cars. Members of the group also sold one of the seized cars. Hamdan added,

"They put it up for sale at a car dealership in Jindires. I bought it back from the dealership for \$1,200 through a Kurdish friend of mine from Afrin (H. H.). After we fixed it up with about \$1,000 worth of repairs, fighters from the al-Jabha al-Shamiya affiliated with Abu Muhanna took it again."

⁷⁰ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 1 March 2025.

⁷¹ 112th Brigade - 1st Division - 1st Corps, the Syrian Memory Institution, <https://syrianmemory.org/archive/entities/618df4195d5e7700012cb0cb> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁷² "Continued Violations by the SNA Against Kurds in Afrin" [in Arabic], The Violations Documentation Center (VDC), 13 August 2024, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/68379> (last accessed: 10 September 2025);

See also: "Syria/Afrin: Escalating Property Rights Violations and Death of an Elderly Man Unable to Pay Extortion Fees" [in Arabic], Lelun Afrin, 25 February 2025, <https://lelun-afrin.org/ar/%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁷³ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 23 March 2025.

⁷⁴ "Panorama of the Week 2021," Afrin Post, 16 October 2021, <https://afrinpost.net/ar/archives/17611> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁷⁵ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/43/57), 2 March 2020, paragraphs 41-42, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/43/57> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

One member of the faction was still living in Hamdan’s second home at the time of the interview in April 2025. On 21 December 2024, the Interim Government appointed Azzam al-Gharib (better known as Abu al-Ezz Saraqib), the commander-in-chief of the al-Jabha al-Shamiya, as governor of Aleppo⁷⁶.

Ismat Hassan (52),⁷⁷ a Kurdish displaced person living in Sweden, explained that his home in the al-Ashrafiya neighborhood of Afrin was confiscated in 2018 by a displaced man from the Jobar neighborhood of Damascus, even though it had been legally rented out. He mentioned that in 2023, the man sold the house for \$2,500 to a commander in the “Joint Forces,” who was still living there as of the interview in March 2025. Ismat noted that his relatives in the neighborhood witnessed the seizure, which was carried out under the claim that the owner did not reside there and that the tenant had “ties to the former Autonomous Administration”.

Amer Zalkhko (63),⁷⁸ a Kurdish displaced person living in Qamishli/Qamishlo and a former car dealership owner, said that the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction,⁷⁹ led by a man known as Abu Fawaz, took his family’s home in the village of Miska Fouqani/Miskê Jorin in Jindires subdistrict. His parents witnessed the seizure and the looting that followed, including a tractor he owned, which was later sold at a public auction and bought by his cousin.

One of the factions that seized control of the al-Ashrafiya neighborhood in Afrin city turned one of Jamil Banan’s two homes into a prison and later a military base after looting it. Banan (68),⁸⁰ a Kurdish electrical technician displaced to Qamishli/Qamishlo, said that the house contained furnishings from two homes, as well as electrical equipment related to his work, estimated to be worth more than \$130,000. He explained,

“According to what neighbors told us, they took the women’s underwear out into the street and set it on fire in front of the neighbors, claiming that the house belonged to supporters of the Autonomous Administration”.

As for his second home, it was occupied, at the time of the interview in January 2025, by a commander from the Military Police,⁸¹ according to Banan. He added,

⁷⁶ "Appointed Governor of Aleppo: Who Is Azzam al-Gharib, 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: 10 September 2025)

⁷⁷ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 5 March 2025.

⁷⁸ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 19 December 2024.

⁷⁹ "Afrin: Ahrar al-Sharqiya Tortures a Civilian to Death", STJ, 1 March 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-ahrar-al-sharqiya-tortures-a-civilian-to-death/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

⁸⁰ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 31 January 2025.

⁸¹ "Turkish Gendarmerie Continues Training and Equipping Afrin’s Syrian Police Forces" [in Arabic], Anadolu Agency, 28 June 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/1189624> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

“The factions also stolen the contents of my only son’s home six months after his marriage. All of his belongings were of the finest and highest quality, worth more than \$7,000. After seizing the house and its contents, they urinated on the bed”.

Banan’s property seizure also included his commercial properties, such as a shop in the al-Sinaa neighborhood. Originally, it consisted of seven shops covering 500 square meters, which he had intended to use as a restaurant. The shop was seized by a man from the village of Inab/Inabkê in the Afrin subdistrict. Banan said,

“I spoke to him (the person who seized the property) six months after our displacement, using a neighbor’s phone and identified myself as the owner of the shop. He replied, ‘The owner of the shop is the Free Syrian Army, not you.’ The shop stayed closed for three months, claiming it was booby-trapped, with a sign warning people not to approach. I believe he belonged to the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction”.

Besides the shops, Banan still cannot access or run his sugar factory on Jindires road because he cannot return to Afrin due to threats accusing him of collaborating with the Autonomous Administration.

Like Banan, Khalil Abdullo (72),⁸² a Kurdish farmer who was displaced to Tall Rifat, remains unable to access four homes, two plots of land, and several shops he owns in Afrin. The factions seized all of them when they entered the area, including his house in the Bulbul subdistrict. Over the years, it was taken over alternately by the al-Hamzat and the al-Amshat Divisions. Abdullo said,

“They turned my house and the one next to it into a headquarters, then later they gave it to one of their fighters. Right now, it seems they have started exploiting the well on my house, which has powerful, plentiful water, by filling tankers and selling the water to local residents.”

Also in Bulbul subdistrict, Abdallo who owns three shops that he inherited from his father explained,

“I used to rent them out, but after the factions entered the area, they seized them and expelled the tenants. All I know is that they turned two of the shops into a tire repair workshop and the third into a men’s barbershop. I do not know who exactly took them over”.

For his part, Behjat Sheikhmous (57),⁸³ a Kurdish employee with the Autonomous Administration who was displaced to Raqqa, said that the al-Hamzat Division was still occupying his home in the village of Kukan Tahtani/Kokanê Jêrin in Maabatli subdistrict as of December 2024, according to neighbors who contacted him secretly.⁸⁴

⁸² Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 27 October 2024.

⁸³ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 30 December 2024.

⁸⁴ “Syria: ‘Get out of Here before You See Things You Would Not Like, and Never Return!’”, STJ, 8 October 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-get-out-of-here-before-you-see-things-you-would-not-like-and-never-return/> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

Sheikhmous added that when the SNA factions entered the village, they looted all the contents of the house, including 260 tins of olives, and also seized an agricultural tractor and a motorcycle. He added,

Later, they handed over the house and the entire property to the al-Hamzat Division, part of the SNA, and initially made it a security headquarters. Later, a Division commander known as Abu Sultan turned it into his personal residence, housing his two wives, one on each floor. He then seized 4,000 olive trees owned by the family and has been exploiting them ever since.

The al-Hamzat Division also converted another house owned by Sheikhmous in the city of Afrin into a security headquarters, and later assigned one of its members there, a man named Abdo Azizi from the city of A'zaz in Aleppo countryside, according to what his neighbors told him.

Regarding the use of seized homes for residential purposes, four of the people we interviewed pointed to the involvement of the Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh Brigade, the Samarkand Brigade, and the al-Waqas Brigade, that merged in 2021 under the name of the 13th Division within the SNA.⁸⁵ Dilshad Beko (50),⁸⁶ a Kurdish English-language translator displaced to Qamishli/Qamishlo, said that two different families affiliated with the Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh Brigade lived in his home in the village of Haj Qasim/Hec Qasma in Maabatli subdistrict after he fled.⁸⁷ The second family, belonging to a fighter named Ghaith Qaddour, was still living there at the time of the interview in December 2024. The Division's former overall commander was the Turkmen colonel Dogan Suleiman,⁸⁸ who was reportedly appointed as a brigade commander in the 72nd Division in Aleppo in April 2025⁸⁹.

Akif Khoja (52),⁹⁰ a Kurdish former civil servant now living in Germany, said that a member of the Samarkand Brigade was still living in his mother's home in the village of Kafr Safra/Kefersefrê in Jindires subdistrict at the time of the interview in March 2025. He added,

"My mother (F.K.), who is 81 years old, was displaced to Aleppo in 2018 and returned to the village a year ago, but she has not been able to reclaim the house from the man occupying it, known as Abu Omar, from Zawiya Mountain in Idlib, who is an armed member of the Samarkand Brigade that controls the village. She was forced to live in my sister's home; my sister is married to one of our relatives in the village. Despite her repeated attempts to get her house back, she has achieved nothing so far."

⁸⁵ Facebook post by the Macro Media Center (MMC), 28 May 2021, https://www.facebook.com/SYRMMC/posts/pfbid0331U2cvtm2cUTa3QT04GbZqJayCi5ZmXfNxqhmSpJ8fwobkTAJ8HiFhSJk2bK4qJA1?_rdc=1&_rdr# (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁸⁶ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 23 December 2024.

⁸⁷ "Extortion and Looting... Afrin's Olive Groves as a Source of Income for Armed Factions" [in Arabic], North Press Agency, 8 November 2023, <https://npasyria.com/172441/> (last accessed: 12 August 2025); See also: "Syria/Libya: Complaint to the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries", Synergy Association for Victims, 27 March 2022, <https://hevdesti.org/en/syria-libya-complaint-to-the-un-working-group-on-the-use-of-mercenaries/> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁸⁸ "Dogan Suleiman", the Syrian Memory Institution, <https://syrianmemory.org/archive/figures/624b59d0c1dd380001a5463c> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁸⁹ Facebook post by Suriye Türkmen Meclisi (English: the Syrian Turkmen Council) dated 17 April 2025, https://www.facebook.com/meclisturkmen/posts/pfbid0244BtvqRcdnehZ87ziMRK5y7ACUQThAUUBkbRqdU4vp9KFNZ7s67vGwKC6hv1zXaPl?locale=ar_AR&_rdc=1&_rdr# (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁹⁰ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 3 March 2025.

In the same village, Nurhat Bakr's family (55), a displaced Kurdish man living in Germany, was unable to reclaim his home, which, as of March 2025, remained under the control of a member of the Samarkand Brigade. The fighter had taken over the house claiming the owner was absent and allegedly linked to the Autonomous Administration. Thaer Ma'rouf, who commands the brigade, had also been involved in the illegal resettlement of SNA fighters and their families in a housing project in Kafr Safra that had been publicly described as intended to shelter IDPs in the Afrin area⁹¹.

Abdulrahman al-Sayyid (58),⁹² a displaced Kurdish man living in Qamishli/Qamishlo, said that two different commanders from the al-Waqas Brigade had lived in his home in the village of Kafr Safra in Jindires subdistrict.⁹³ He added that the first had been a security official, while the second, who was still occupying the house at the time of the interview, January 2025, served as an economic officer known as Abu Muhammad, originally from Khan al-Asal, west of Aleppo⁹⁴.

Walshir Seydo (38),⁹⁵ a Kurdish displaced person in Qamishli/Qamishlo and a civil society worker, learned from neighbors that his home in the al-Vilat neighborhood of Afrin had been used by factions controlling the area to house multiple families since his displacement in 2018. Initially, a family displaced from Eastern Ghouta lived in his apartment for three months. Later, a commander named Abu Maryam al-Kurdi' who had seized another apartment in the same building, evicted the family claiming that the apartment's owner “supported the PKK,” and wrote the phrase “Reserved for Jaysh al-Islam” on the wall. The Jaysh al-Islam was part of the 2nd Corps of the SNA,⁹⁶ led by Issam Buaydani (Abu Hammam), who had been a spokesperson for the “Victory Conference” and later held a position in the Ministry of Defense under the Interim Government, before being arrested in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in April 2025⁹⁷.

⁹¹ "Afrin/Jindires: Ihsan Relief and Development Cuts Down Hundreds of Trees to Build an Illegal Village", STJ, 20 September 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-jindires-ihsan-relief-and-development-cuts-down-hundreds-of-trees-to-build-an-illegal-village/> (last accessed: 12 August 2025);

See also: "Children and armed conflict", Report of the Secretary-General (A/75/873-S/2021/437) [EN/AR/RU/ZH], Relief Web, 21 June 2021, para. 95, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/children-and-armed-conflict-report-secretary-general-a75873-s2021437-enaruzh> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁹² Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 27 January 2025.

⁹³ Promo for Operation Olive Branch, video posted on YouTube by the al-Waqas Brigade, part of the 1st Corps of the SNA, 31 July 2020, <https://youtu.be/lz5m4jF35-g?feature=shared> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁹⁴ "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: 12 August 2025)

⁹⁵ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 14 November 2024.

⁹⁶ "Afrin: Clashes between Jaysh al-Islam and al-Jabha al-Shamiya lead to civilian deaths", STJ, 24 February 2021, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-clashes-between-jaysh-al-islam-and-al-jabha-al-shamiya-lead-to-civilian-deaths/> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

⁹⁷ "Who Is Issam Buaydani, a Leader in the Syrian Interim Government... and What Are the Implications of His Arrest in the UAE?" [in Arabic], Monte Carlo Doualiya, 28 April 2025, <https://www.mc-doualiya.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7/20250428-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%88-%D8%B9%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

Fatma Qader (55),⁹⁸ a Kurdish housewife living in Aleppo, said that her family's home on al-Vilat Street in Afrin was taken over by a displaced family from the city of al-Bab in Aleppo countryside, likely linked to the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction, which controlled the neighborhood and had established a checkpoint in front of the house that was still there in October 2024. Qader added that her sister's husband tried to reclaim the house, but all efforts failed. She confirmed,

“They said they would pay rent, but they have not paid anything so far, and there is no contract between the residents and my sister's husband. When he asked for the house, they told him to live in it himself, which seemed like an excuse not to leave. They also claimed they did not have the money to pay and that the elderly woman, who lives in the house with her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren, was raising orphans. This woman is the mother of a fighter in an armed faction operating in the al-Bab area.”

According to Qader, her sister's husband stopped trying to reclaim the home after receiving threats of arrest and death from the occupiers.

5.3. Seizure of agricultural lands and denial of owners' use

The seizure of the homes of most of the people we interviewed coincided with similar takeovers of their agricultural lands, mostly olive orchards. Factions of the SNA that controlled these areas exploited the lands, and in some cases uprooted the trees, particularly in areas containing archaeological sites, allegedly for excavation purposes. The lands of two interviewees were seized by the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction. One of them, Nader Barazi,⁹⁹ a farmer and shop owner, was prevented by the faction from accessing a plot he owned behind the Al-Manar Specialized Hospital in Afrin city, which they exploited without his permission or compensation. In mid-2023, the faction reportedly rented the land to the hospital to open an ambulance access route connecting a rear gate of the hospital building to the plot, for a fee of \$1,000 per month, according to information obtained from one of the hospital's doctors.

In addition to this plot, Barazi owns an olive orchard with 50 trees, which in 2024 produced 50 sacks of olives and about 11 tins of olive oil. Barazi lost half of the oil due to multiple levies imposed by SNA factions on farmers in Afrin. He paid two tins to the al-Hamzat Division, which managed the orchard, along with 2,000 Turkish lira (TL) as a “guard tax,” and about three and a half tins to the al-Amshat Division,¹⁰⁰ as a fee for pressing the olives at a mill the latter designated in advance¹⁰¹.

Another person whose land was seized by the Ahrar al-Sharqiya was Aref Hamo (63),¹⁰² a Kurdish farmer who stayed in Afrin. Hamo said that a faction official named Abu Hatim had

⁹⁸ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 27 November 2024.

⁹⁹ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 31 May 2024.

¹⁰⁰ “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: 12 August 2025)

¹⁰¹ “Rising Violations and Imposition of Levies in Afrin by the al-Hamzat and al-Amshat Factions” [in Arabic], VDC, 16 September 2024, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/68615> (last accessed: 12 August 2025);

See also: Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/49/77), 8 February 2022, para. 92, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/49/77> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

¹⁰² Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 27 January 2025.

controlled the management of an olive orchard on the road to the village of Emara in Maabatli subdistrict for six years. The orchard belonged to his brother, who had legally given Hamo power of attorney to manage it.¹⁰³ Hamo noted that the official changed when the faction's economic office was taken over by a man named Abu Reda, but the orchard's situation did not change. After mediation by parties close to Abu Reda, he agreed to allow Hamo to tend and cultivate the land in exchange for a share of the firewood. However, Abu Reda broke the agreement during the 2024 harvest season, when the trees produced about 25 sacks of olives. Hamo said,

“I went to check on the trees and was shocked to find that all the olives had been stolen. The culprit was Abu Steif, who works with Abu Reda at the economic office. When I informed Abu Reda, he shirked responsibility and blamed others in the area. I did not dare to accuse them and could not claim the stolen harvest.”

Hamo's property rights violations went beyond the seizure of his olive harvest. A commander from the al-Jabha al-Shamiya, named Abu Ammar al-Homsi, confiscated and looted an olive mill he co-owned with his late brother in Maabatli subdistrict, and rented out the building to someone who turned it into a bakery between 2020 and 2021. Hamo was unable to recover the mill despite filing a complaint with the Front's leadership in the village of Kafr Janneh in the Sharran subdistrict. The mill later came under the control of the al-Amshat Division when they took over Maabatli. Hamo also stated that the value of the mill's equipment alone is roughly 60 million Syrian pounds (SYP) (about \$6,000).

In the context of factions renting out seized agricultural lands, Haider Rasho (70),¹⁰⁴ a Kurdish farmer who had temporarily returned to Afrin about a year ago, said that the economic office of the Ahrar al-Sham, located in Afrin's industrial area, had seized several of his family's orchards near the al-Ashrafiya neighborhood and rented them out under annual contracts. Rasho narrated,

“We contacted the office, and the officials there promised to return the land at the end of the lease, but this did not happen. After the lease ended, we went to inspect the land, but the tenant refused to let us in, insulted us, and told us we were not allowed to enter again. We then returned to the Ahrar al-Sham economic office, where they said they had renewed the lease with the same person and that the contract would end on 11 November 2025.” Notably, the overall commander of Ahrar al-Sham, Amer al-Sheikh (better known as Abu Ubaida Qatana),¹⁰⁵ was appointed governor of Rural Damascus by the Interim Government¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰³ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64), 14 March 2024, para. 84, <https://docs.un.org/en/a/hrc/55/64> (last accessed: 12 August 2025)

¹⁰⁴ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 21 December 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Amer al-Sheikh-Abu Ubaida Qatana, the Syrian Memory Institution, <https://syrianmemory.org/archive/figures/60e6c9c02bb76d000121209f> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

¹⁰⁶ “The Most Prominent Figures Who Took Control in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime” [in Arabic], al-Quds al-Arabi, 17 December 2024, <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D9%87%D8%B0%D9%87-%D9%87%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA->

The land was not the only property that factions rented out, with the proceeds not benefiting the Rasho family. A commander from the al-Mu'tasim Division took control of the family's house on the Afrin–Bassouta road and occupied it, along with four commercial shops at the same location, refusing to return them despite multiple requests from the family, the last of which came after the fall of the regime. Rasho explained,

“We went again to discuss the house and the shops, but he (the commander) refused to return them and demanded a sum of money, which we do not have. If we had the money, we would have rented a house ourselves instead of staying in relatives' homes. He demanded \$4,000 to return our house, and as for the shops, he rented them out and we did not receive any rental income.”

In April 2025, reports indicated that the overall commander of the al-Mu'tasim Division, al-Mu'tasim Abbas, had been appointed commander of the infantry brigade of the 80th Division in the New Syrian Army.¹⁰⁷ The agricultural lands of three individuals we interviewed were seized by the Jaysh al-Nukhba and the Suqour al-Shamal Brigade for over six years, from 2018 to 2023. Suqour al-Shamal controlled an olive orchard with 750 trees in the village of Sheikh Khawrz in Bulbul subdistrict, inherited by Bilal Qaziqli (44) from his father.¹⁰⁸ Qaziqli's repeated attempts to reclaim his land from the faction's local official in the village, Abu Talal, who is close to faction leader Hassan Khairiya, failed. Describing Abu Talal's behavior, Qaziqli said,

“Abu Talal would take half of the harvest and give the other half to the faction. I was not the only one; even the olive owners whose trees are under their names do not get them back, under the pretext that there is a Turkish base and that the people are affiliated with the [PKK] Party, with multiple accusations against them to prevent their return”.

Qaziqli noted that the situation remained unchanged when the Faylaq al-Sham took control of his village in 2024;¹⁰⁹ he was still denied access to his orchard and its harvest at the time of the interview in December 2024. The overall commander of the Faylaq al-Sham, Mundhir Sarras (Abu Ubada), was previously a member of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces,¹¹⁰ the political umbrella of the SNA, which was reportedly planning to disband soon.¹¹¹

In the village of Sheikh Khawrz, Qasim stated in another part of his testimony that he owns four olive orchards, which were seized by three different factions. One of the orchards, planted with 800 trees, was controlled by a commander from the Suqour al-Shamal Brigade, known as

[%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%91%D9%85%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87/](#) (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

¹⁰⁷ Facebook post by Halab Today TV dated 18 April 2025.

¹⁰⁸ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 22 December 2024.

¹⁰⁹ "Afrin: Al-Sham Legion Tortured a Civilian to Death", STJ, 31 March 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/afrin-al-sham-legion-tortured-a-civilian-to-death/> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

¹¹⁰ Mundhir Sarras, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, December 2024, <https://www.etilaf.org/previous-members/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B0%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3> (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

¹¹¹ Video posted on X by Syria TV. Dated 10 February 2025, https://x.com/syr_television/status/1889000125101478296 (last accessed: 15 July 2025)

Abu al-Sheikh, along with his two brothers. Qasim added that he tried to reclaim his land through negotiations with Abu al-Sheikh, but the latter demanded \$8,000 in exchange for returning it. He also noted that another commander, nicknamed Qarou', who operates under Abu al-Sheikh, had seized a tractor he owned and only returned it after Qasim paid \$1,300. Qasim further reported that Qarou' had cut down approximately 400 olive trees belonging to different owners in the village, including some of his own, on an archaeological mound, allegedly for excavation purposes, causing significant damage to the site.¹¹²

Qasim was asked to pay \$6,000, which he does not have, to recover another olive orchard, this one planted with approximately 160 trees, that had been taken over by a security official in Jaysh al-Nukhba, known as Hisham al-Masri. Qasim said,

"I tried many times to persuade Hisham al-Masri to return my land, but he refused. In the end, he told me: 'The price for getting your land back is known, and it is fixed just as I have already told you. And now the trees have borne fruit, you must also pay for the value of the harvest. Only then can you get your land back.' Mathematically, the harvest is worth around \$10,000, yet they are demanding about \$6,000 from me. How could I possibly have that amount, when they have deprived me of my land and its produce for seven years"?

He added,

"Hisham al-Masri once told me verbatim: 'We are merciful with the people of the area. We return their lands to them out of compassion. If we were carrying out Türkiye's orders, we would not return even a single tree to its owners.' He even claimed that the Turks told them that these lands and houses had become theirs, and that if anyone demanded the return of their property, they should kill them immediately or do whatever they wanted with them, and not give them anything".

Qasim mentioned that Colonel Mu'taz Raslan, a commander in the SNA, was also involved in extortion. Qasim had to pay \$10 for each tree he owned to the faction, which went directly to Raslan. Of all his orchards, he was only able to recover one, planted with 160 olive trees, controlled by the Sultan Murad Division. He regained it after paying the division \$800 and two tins of olive oil.

In a corroborating statement, Youssef said that a man known as Abu al-Sheikh had seized his olive orchard in the village of Sheikh Khawrz, which was planted with more than 1,300 trees. He added that his family also owned a smaller olive orchard with 30 trees on an archaeological mound in the village, called Tel al-Bir. Youssef explained in another part of his testimony,

"Jaysh al-Nukhba completely leveled the mound, including my orchard, uprooting and destroying approximately 300 trees. There was even an ancient well on the site, which they damaged and filled in".

¹¹² "Tel al-Bir (Sheikh Khawrz) Archaeological Site Violations by the Turkish Occupation and Its Militias in Occupied Afrin" [in Arabic], Facebook post by AAN dated 18 November 2020, https://www.facebook.com/afrin.activists/posts/870944693724689?_rdr (last accessed: 15 July 2025); See also: "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/>

Figure (11) below shows the geographic location of Tel al-Bir (coordinates: [36.740112, 36.883581](#)) linked with a live photo of the site displaying ongoing excavation work, obtained by STJ from the victim, Walid Youssef.



23/6/2018

سوربون
مركز
الدراسة
والعدالة
سوريان
للاصالة
& Justice



Image © 2018 Maxar Technologies

28/9/2019

Image © 2019 Maxar Technologies

20/3/2022



Image © 2022 CNES / Airbus

Figure (12) above displays three satellite images of the Tel al-Bir site, showing the progression of excavation activities between 2018, 2019, and 2022.

Jaysh al-Nukhba also bulldozed a small plot of farmland Youssef owned on the bank of the Abboudan/Ebûdan River, along with plots belonging to other owners, and turned the area into a fish farm. He added,

“But God will not forgive them. I later heard that their entire project collapsed, and they abandoned our land”.

6. Arresting property owners and extorting them to force relinquishment of their assets

Some factions of the SNA used financial extortion, threats, arrests, and practices resembling torture to pressure residents into leaving Afrin and giving up their property.¹¹³ According to the testimonies of eight individuals interviewed for this report, victims or their relatives, several were arrested upon returning to Afrin from displacement areas, driven by a desire to recover their property and resettle in the region.

Kamal Qoja (39),¹¹⁴ a Kurdish driver, fled to Tall Rifat after being arrested three times, each detention lasting from several days to an entire week, by the al-Shamal Brigade led by Ahmad (Abu Hussein). These arrests occurred shortly after the faction took control of the village of Abráz/Avrazê in Maabatli subdistrict in 2018. The purpose of the arrests was to force the family to surrender their property, including their home and five olive orchards with old-growth trees, under the false claim that the family “supported and collaborated with the Autonomous Administration,” making their property considered “spoils”. Qoja said he attempted to refute the accusations by presenting ownership documents, but the faction refused to accept them and kept detaining him. He recounted,

“I was at home when four armed members of the group arrived in a pickup truck with a mounted DShK machine gun. They told me I had to report to their headquarters and took me with them. As soon as we arrived, they started beating me badly and said that all my family’s property was their loot and that they would seize it. When I objected, they detained me at their headquarters, which was in one of the village houses. I was arrested three times. Each time, they put me in solitary confinement, which was basically a bathroom. They constantly beat, insulted, and humiliated me, taking turns torturing me in every way: suspension (shabeh/balanco), beating with a quadruple electric cable, water hose whipping, and electric shocks. There was no form of torture they did not use against me.”

¹¹³ “Everything is by the Power of the Weapon”, Human Rights Watch, 29 February 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/29/everything-power-weapon/abuses-and-impunity-turkish-occupied-northern-syria> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹¹⁴ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 7 October 2024.

Qoja added,

“Once, they told me they were going to execute me. They started shouting and chanting ‘Allahu Akbar,’ then fired their weapons. I genuinely believed I had been killed. I was in total shock, terrified in a way I cannot even describe. I do not know how much time passed before I realized I was still alive and that it had all been an act meant to terrorize me and force me to leave the country. During detention, they gave us nothing, no food, no water, no cigarettes. When we asked for water, they told anyone who was thirsty to drink their own urine.”

Qoja said he could identify two of the members involved in the torture. The first was a man named Abd al-Ilah (Abu Ahmad), and the second was a jailer known as Abu Jum’a from the village of Yazi Bagh (al-Kurum) in the A’zaz countryside of Aleppo. According to Qoja, Abu Jum’a had previously been part of the Islamic State (ISIS) before joining al-Shamal Brigade¹¹⁵. Regarding the property seizures he experienced, they included a large electric generator he used for business purposes, now valued at over \$15,000, as well as a tractor with its attachments, also worth about \$15,000. His home was also stripped of all its contents during the period when al-Shamal Brigade controlled the village.

Qoja, who has never returned to the village, noted that his family was unable to recover any of their property even after control of the village shifted to the 9th Division, led by a man named Ahmad Zaem from Anadan city in Aleppo. The faction also prevented all of his relatives from approaching their orchards or their home, which had been occupied by a displaced family from Eastern Ghouta until the time of the interview in October 2024. It is worth noting that the overall commander of the 9th Division is Abd al-Nasir Shallouh (Abu Jalal), who participated with the division in all Turkish military operations in Syria¹¹⁶.

Like Qoja, Rifaat Amin (61),¹¹⁷ a Kurdish teacher now living in Germany, fled his village of Ba’dina/ Bedīna in the Rajo subdistrict after being arrested by members of the al-Muntasir Billah Division, the same faction that later seized his home and posted a sign on it stating: “This house is reserved for the al-Muntasir Billah Division” in May 2018, after looting all its contents. The arrest occurred on 16 April 2018, and Amin described it as follows,

“Four members of the faction raided my house. After they opened the door, one of them said, ‘Come with us and bring your car.’ When I was taken, they confiscated my belongings, including my phone, wristwatch, wallet, belt, and shoes, and started questioning me, accusing me of various offenses such as being a member of the [PKK] Party at one point, of communism at another, and of being an activist. I was then imprisoned for 14 days. Every evening, a physically strong man would come and beat

¹¹⁵ "Ongoing Violations Without Accountability: Islamic State Members in the Syrian National Army", STJ, 28 June 2021, <https://stj-sy.org/en/ongoing-violations-without-accountability-islamic-state-members-in-the-syrian-national-army/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹¹⁶ Abd al-Nasir Shallouh -Abu Jalal, the Syrian Memory Institution, <https://syrianmemory.org/archive/figures/5e91b613c429f100016d3159> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹¹⁷ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 1 February 2025.

us and subject us to torture. On one occasion, I was hit with an iron rod and lost consciousness. I was released on bail on 30 April after they failed to prove the charges against me. Even after my release, I was forced to report to their headquarters every morning to sign in.”

Amin’s house was reportedly still occupied, according to relatives in the village, as of early February 2025. The overall commander of the al-Muntasir Billah Division is Firas Pasha,¹¹⁸ a Turkmen who participated in Operation Olive Branch in 2018.¹¹⁹ Later reports linked him to drug trafficking in northwestern Syria alongside other SNA leaders, noting that Turkish security patrols had seized drug shipments from him twice, although he was released “following intervention by Turkish intelligence¹²⁰”.

In another part of his testimony, Ma’mo described being arrested by the Faylaq al-Sham after he returned with his family to his village of Jaqmaq Kabir/Ceqmaqê mazin in the Rajo subdistrict following temporary displacement. The arrest happened after he requested the return of a Hyundai pickup truck and a tractor that the faction had seized upon his return. Ma’mo and his brother were taken to the faction’s headquarters in Bayanoun, Aleppo countryside, on charges of “collaborating with the PKK.” He was severely beaten by 20 members, and another fighter, Ahmad al-Sakeef (Ahmad Tom), filmed him with a shell placed in his hands. Ma’mo explained,

“All of these acts were aimed at keeping me from recovering my pickup truck and tractor, or forcing me to pay them \$50,000. Ahmad al-Sakeef threatened to release photos and a video, falsely claiming that I was a PKK member. Afterwards, they handed me over to the Turkish forces, who had turned al-Ameer Ghubari School in Afrin into a headquarters and detention center.¹²¹ After roughly 20 days of questioning,¹²² the Turks told me I was innocent and said, ‘If you had been wanted, we would have transferred you to a prison in Türkiye.’”¹²³

He was questioned by two officers, one Arab and one Turkish named Genghis, before being sent to the Afrin court for a “reconciliation with the SNA,” for which he paid 50,000 SYP as bail. It is worth noting that Ma’mo’s house was also seized: the Sultan Murad Division initially used it as a military headquarters before handing it over to the Faylaq al-Sham. During that

¹¹⁸ Firas Pasha, commander of the al-Muntasir Billah Division, the Syrian Memory Institution, <https://syrianmemory.org/archive/figures/5cd8126de2bb8f000177a719> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹¹⁹ “Liberating a training camp from Kurdish separatist parties and terrorist gangs,” a video posted on YouTube by al-Muntasir Billah Division, 12 March 2018, <https://youtu.be/sICMzHG9INY?feature=shared>

¹²⁰ “Names of SNA Leaders and Members Involved in Drug Trafficking Networks in Areas Under Their Control in Rural Aleppo” [in Arabic], VDC, 28 October 2021, <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/50949> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹²¹ “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: 10 September 2025)

¹²² Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64) dated 14 March 2024, para. 79, <https://docs.un.org/en/a/hrc/55/64> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹²³ “Illegal Transfers of Syrians to Turkey”, Human Rights Watch, 3 February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/03/illegal-transfers-syrians-turkey> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

time, Ma'mo was forced to stay in his brother's house until the Faylaq al-Sham vacated the property.

Mohammed Isso (29),¹²⁴ a Kurdish owner of a sewing supplies shop, was forced to flee Afrin due to threats from the Sultan Murad Division, which controlled their neighborhood, Old Afrin. The faction had previously arrested him along with his father and mother when they secretly returned to Afrin after being displaced during Operation Olive Branch. They were detained for 20 days by the division's fighters in a house in the village of Abboudan in the Sharran subdistrict, also under the faction's control. The family managed to escape and return to their neighborhood, but within days, the fighters started surveilling Isso. He secretly fled the area to Manbij and eventually settled in Aleppo. Isso recounted,

“Just days after my escape, faction members began coming to my father's house intermittently, sometimes claiming they were looking for me, other times threatening him about his three children, who had all been employees of the Autonomous Administration. Their visits continued for about a year, alternating between threats and intimidation, until April 2019. Then they told my parents, who had remained in the city, that they had only one option: to surrender ownership of nine shops, two belonging to my father and the remaining seven to my uncles, to the Sultan Murad Division. The justification was that three of my brothers and I had worked with the Administration, and they threatened that if we refused, we would face arrest and torture at the hands of the Turks and the military police”.

Isso said that his parents fled the neighborhood two days after the threats, adding,

“A week after my father left, a neighbor called to inform us that the Sultan Murad Division (Usod al-Haramayn Brigade) had surrounded the house and entered it. They asked about my mother and father from a man from Eastern Ghouta, whom my father had left in the house the night he left the city to protect its contents. They told him that the owners of the house were affiliated with the [PKK] Party, and that the house now belonged to them. They gave him two options: either leave the house or pay rent to them. Since that time, they have controlled the house”.

The tenant contacted Isso's father and told him he would try to protect the house where he still lives. Meanwhile, the brigade continued to exploit the 11 shops, renting them out as if they were their own property.

Several of those we interviewed were subjected to financial extortion, with factions that seized their property demanding large sums in exchange for its return. Among them was Qasem, who managed to recover only one of his two seized apartments in Afrin. The apartment was under the control of a man known as Abu Abd al-Rahman from the Sultan Murad Division, who served

¹²⁴ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 3 November 2024.

as the officer in charge of one of the division’s security headquarters on the Rajo road, near the Kabso restaurant. Qasem said in another part of his testimony,

“They returned it to me after I paid them \$2,300, and Abu Abd al-Rahman made me sign documents stating that they had returned it without any financial compensation”.

Araz Ibrahim (55), a Kurdish auto parts trader returned to Afrin after being released from a detention center operated by the former Syrian government in Damascus. He aimed to reclaim his house in the village of Arsh Qibar/Erşqîbar, in the Afrin subdistrict. The house had been taken over by a man linked to the Mu’tasim Division, named Ammar Ka’ko (Abu al-Joud), who demanded \$10,000 for its return, leading Ibrahim to flee to Aleppo out of fear of Ka’ko’s threats.

Ibrahim recounted,

“The intermediary between me and Ammar Ka’ko told me that Ammar controls our village and advised me to be cautious. He said Ammar knew I was wealthy and that if I came to the village, he would arrest me and confiscate everything I own. Ammar had already looted the house and, on top of that, demanded \$10,000 for its return. This led to a conflict between us, and he threatened that he would come after me in Aleppo and arrest me on the pretext that I was working with the PKK”.

7. Lack of Effective Remedies, Grievance Mechanisms

The testimonies of property owners outlined above show not only the dire condition of property rights in the Afrin area but also the failure of mechanisms to restore those rights. Efforts were mostly limited to direct negotiations between owners and the armed factions that took their property, putting owners at risk of arrest, threats, and extortion. The almost total absence or ineffectiveness of formal or informal grievance mechanisms reinforced a climate of impunity for the factions, while police and courts were either complicit,¹²⁵ powerless, or unable to hold them accountable¹²⁶.

At least five individuals interviewed for this report filed complaints with various authorities but did not recover their property. Among them, Rasho, who stated, “There is no law we can turn to,” referring to the refusal of internally displaced families from Eastern Ghouta to vacate his family home in the village of Terindi/Tirindî, Afrin center, despite repeated deadlines to find alternative housing, while his family lived with relatives.

¹²⁵ “Jindires/Afrin: The Nowruz Murder Trial in the Shadow of Wider Violations and Impunity”, STJ, 20 March 2024, <https://stj-sy.org/en/jindires-afrin-the-nowruz-murder-trial-in-the-shadow-of-wider-violations-and-impunity/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025);

See also: “Northwest Syria: Local Authorities Arrest 15 Syrians for Protesting near a Turkish Convoy”, STJ, 9 July 2024, <https://stj-sy.org/en/northwest-syria-local-authorities-arrest-15-syrians-for-protesting-near-a-turkish-convoy/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹²⁶ “Northwest Syria: Fighters Flog a Man for “Insulting God”, STJ, 1 March 2024, <https://stj-sy.org/en/northwest-syria-fighters-flog-a-man-for-insulting-god/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025);

See also: “Northwest Syria: Levant Front Responsible for Executing Suspects in A’zaz Bombing”, STJ, 15 August 2024, <https://stj-sy.org/en/northwest-syria-levant-front-responsible-for-executing-suspects-in-azaz-bombing/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

He added,

“Four families live in the house, three of whom are connected to the faction in charge, the al-Amshat Division, and all are relatives. The last time we went to speak with them, they addressed us in a military manner and said ‘we would not return the house.’ When we filed a complaint, a court official told us that these families belong to the factions and that we cannot evict them from our home.”

In another part of his testimony, Ma'mo said that he had submitted about 13 complaints to various authorities in Afrin in an effort to recover his pickup truck and tractor, but all of them resulted in either neglect or further threats of arrest. The authorities he reached out to included civil and military police in multiple areas, the general command of the military police, and the general command of the Faylaq al-Sham, whose members had seized the vehicles, as well as the “Grievance Redress Committees.” Regarding the latter, he said,

“I filed a complaint with the Grievance Redress Committee, which claims to restore rights to its owners, but in my case, it was the opposite. I met a man named Khattab from Hama who told me verbatim: ‘If you do not want your children to become orphans, abandon your claim for your truck and tractor, because if you pursue it, we will kill you.’ I even filed a complaint with the Turkish authorities, and they told me to go and make peace with the faction [that seized the vehicles], to reach a settlement and pay them. But I refused to pay anyone, especially since I do not have \$50,000.”

Ma'mo spoke about the bias of authorities in Afrin against Kurdish victims, saying,

“No matter how hard you try to file a complaint against them, in the complaints offices they tell you, ‘Since you are Kurdish, put your complaint papers under the table or burn them, there are no rights for Kurds here.’”

He noted that Ahmad al-Sakeef (Ahmad Tom), a member of the Faylaq al-Sham, sold his pickup truck to a member of al-Shamal Brigade named Ahmad al-Zurbi, and his tractor to a member of the al-Jabha al-Shamiya, named Abdul Rahman al-Shami, and that both refuse to return the vehicles to him.

The Grievance Redress Committee, established in Afrin in 2020, aiming to address increasing complaints about property seizures and other violations of property rights,¹²⁷ failed to operate effectively. The committee included representatives from the factions involved in the violations under complaints, including groups mentioned in this report, such as the Sultan Murad Division and the al-Hamzat Division. This led to widespread hesitation among residents

¹²⁷ "Formation of ‘Redress’ and ‘Reform’ Committees 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: 10 September 2025)

and returnees to demand their property.¹²⁸ The committee was dissolved later that same year¹²⁹.

Al-Barazi also turned to the Grievance Redress Committee after returning to Afrin, only to discover his house in Maabatli had been seized by the Jaysh al-Islam and transferred to the family of a fighter from the al-Hajar al-Aswad neighborhood in Damascus. Al-Barazi had temporarily fled during the Operation Olive Branch and came back in March 2018. He explained that his initial attempt was to reclaim the house through direct negotiation with the faction, stating,

“The first time I asked for my house, I did so through Sheikh Abu Anas of the Jaysh al-Islam. After he negotiated with the fighter, he told me that the fighter demanded \$2,000 to leave the house, which I refused to pay in June 2018. When the Grievance Redress Committee was formed, we filed an official complaint, and the committee ruled that we were only entitled to rent of 20 TL, less than \$1, issued by Sheikh Wissam Qassoum, the Committee’s spokesperson.¹³⁰ After appealing the decision, the ruling allowed us to take the house from the fighter, but when we informed him, the committee leader Khattab (Abu Steif) threatened me with arrest.¹³¹ We never pursued the matter again.”

Al-Barazi had been detained twice before. The first time was by the al-Jabha al-Shamiya in March 2018, for four days of interrogation. The second time was by the Sultan Murad Division in June 2018, for one week. Regarding the second detention, al-Barazi said,

“I was interrogated on the allegation that I was a member of the PKK. After efforts by my father to contact the Kurdish-Turkish translator assigned to Officer Abu Ali of the Turkish intelligence, who oversaw our sector in Afrin, I was released upon paying a ransom of \$1,500”.

He added that after the Jaysh al-Islam left his area, his house was seized by the Sultan Murad Division.

¹²⁸ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/51/45), 14 September 2022, para. 76., <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/51/45> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹²⁹ “Two Years After Its Establishment, Grievance Redress 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/>

¹³⁰ A statement by Sheikh Wissam Qassoum, spokesperson for Grievance Redress Committee in the city of Afrin and its countryside, YouTube video, 31 August 2021, https://youtu.be/_1grSWyEiVc?feature=shared (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹³¹ “Suleiman Shah After Abu Amsha’s Dismissal: The Decision Clears the Division’s Leadership”, Radio Rozana, 17 February 2022, <https://www.rozana.fm/article/45038-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A6-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A9> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

8. The State of Property Rights After 8 December 2024

In its December 2024 report, the COI-Syria stated, “Civilians 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.”¹³²

This sentiment is reflected in the testimonies of nine individuals interviewed for this report, including those who themselves, or their relatives, returned to the area after the fall of the regime or after the Interim Government took over, and who faced extortion, detention, or were unable to file complaints that could help them reclaim their property.

During an interview on 21 December 2024, Mohammed al-Nasser (37),¹³³ a Kurdish farmer who had returned to Rajo subdistrict two weeks after fleeing during the military operation, stated that after the “liberation of Syria,” he was still waiting for the factions to leave the area so his family could reclaim a fuel station they owned. The station had been seized by the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction after looting its contents, following years of failed attempts by the family to recover it. The person to whom the faction handed the station, known as Abu Hedou, refused to return it, accusing the family of “selling fuel to the Party” (PKK), while an economic office official from the faction, Abu Taloub, demanded \$50,000 to evacuate it.

Al-Nasser stated that the faction arrested him in 2021 and held him for four days at their security center in the subdistrict based on false reports, accusing him of “selling diesel to the Party.” He was released only after paying a ransom of \$6,000. He noted that his family’s attempts to file complaints about the fuel station were also unsuccessful, adding,

“The military police official is affiliated with Ahrar al-Sharqiya, and the civilian judiciary refuses to intervene, saying this is a matter for the military courts”.

Adnan Qadour (61),¹³⁴ a former Kurdish employee, regained ownership of his home in the Mahmoudiya neighborhood of Afrin five days after the fall of the regime, but only after facing extortion and threats. For more than six years, Qadour lived with relatives after returning from displacement because a family from Eastern Ghouta had occupied his home and refused to leave until they, like some other displaced families, went back to their original areas. Qadour said,

“I went to the house, and the person had left my key with someone else. I asked for my key, and he demanded an amount he said was for electricity and water bills, so I paid \$150, received the key, and opened the door to my fourth-floor apartment. I was shocked to find that the person who had been living there had removed faucets, interior doors, windows, even electrical outlets and wiring. Only the exterior door remained. I am currently repairing the house, with costs estimated between \$1,500 and \$2,000. This is the ‘reward’ for my goodwill, letting the person live in my home for seven years without paying any rent.”

¹³² Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, (A/HRC/58/CRP.2), 6 December 2024, paras. 89-90. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/pillageandplunder>

¹³³ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 21 December 2024.

¹³⁴ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 22 December 2024.

Regretting the furniture that the displaced person had loaded onto a truck and taken with him, Qadour said,

“When the person was here, I did not dare to file a complaint against him. How could I complain, once he had reached Eastern Ghouta, and against whom?”

He explained that he had previously been afraid to approach the courts because each faction controls a neighborhood and acts as the judiciary. Qadour noted that the person who handed him the key was an armed member of a faction he could not identify, who himself had previously seized and occupied a home in Afrin. He added that this individual threatened to hand over Qadour’s house to the faction controlling the neighborhood if he refused to pay the demanded amount.

Rashid Aymo (45),¹³⁵ a Kurdish civil servant living in Aleppo, was also extorted. In an interview on 23 December 2024, he said that after returning to Afrin following the fall of the regime, he gave a displaced family from rural Homs, who had taken over his house, a six-month deadline to vacate it. A few days later, the family contacted him, saying,

“They are returning to Homs and want \$600 in exchange for handing over the house, or they will remove the windows, doors, sink, and water tank.”

He added that the family had refused to return the house for a year, citing a lack of alternative housing and protection from the Sultan Murad Division controlling their area.

Ali Bakhoura (35),¹³⁶ an Arab car repair worker who did not leave the area, said in an interview on 1 February 2025 that he managed to reclaim his house in the al-Zeidiya neighborhood of Afrin, which had been seized and looted by the Sultan Murad Division right before his eyes. Armed young men later occupied the house and threatened him whenever he tried to claim it.

Bakhoura stated that during the seizure, he reached out to several faction officials trying to recover his home, including a commander named Abu Steif Ma’abar, a security officer called Abu Watan, and officials from the Grievance Redress Committee once it was formed. All of them tried to extort money from him in exchange for mediation to return the house, but nothing came of it. He also filed a complaint with the civil court, which also yielded no results, since the seizing party was a military faction.

Speaking about the condition of his house after reclaiming it, Bakhoura stated,

“The Sultan Murad Division returned the house to me, but only after demanding payment for the electricity and water meters, as well as an extra fee. I paid \$200 to get the house back. I regained my home, but it was completely empty, doors, windows, faucets, and even the electrical appliances were all gone.”

In addition to extortion, arrests continued after the fall of the regime against returnees to Afrin. Among them was Ismail Hanan’s brother (41),¹³⁷ a Kurdish car repair worker who had fled during the military operation to the village of al-Ahdath in northern Aleppo countryside, which

¹³⁵ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 23 December 2024.

¹³⁶ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 1 February 2025.

¹³⁷ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 23 January 2025.

he had to leave after Operation Dawn of Freedom. Hanan said that the Military Police summoned all males returning from the northern Aleppo countryside to their village, al-Ramadiyah in Jindires subdistrict, for questioning, adding,

“They said it was just a simple investigation, but my brother was held for 12 days and they demanded \$1,000 for his release, even though he had no connection to the SDF and was a civilian working as a car mechanic. We collected the amount from our relatives and paid it to secure his release from prison.”

Hanan mentioned that his brother had been living in the family home in the village before they were displaced, but he and his family were forced to stay with him in a small two-room house because the family home was still controlled by a man named Abdo, originally from the village of Andžara in western Aleppo countryside. Abdo is the brother of the village official affiliated with the Nour al-Din al-Zenki faction,¹³⁸ according to the interview in January 2025. Hanan added that he asked Abdo to leave the house, but Abdo demanded \$700 to vacate, an amount beyond his and his brother's financial means.

Hassan Abdo (52),¹³⁹ a Kurdish farmer displaced to Aleppo, reported that his house still falls under the control of a member of the al-Amshat Division, which governs the Maabatli subdistrict, as of the interview on 1 February 2025. Despite visiting the faction's local security office after the regime's fall, he was told that the person occupying his home was on leave, and the officers hinted that money would be needed to regain the property. Abdo said this was not the first time he had been asked for money or faced extortion; the security office official, Abu Ghazi, had previously demanded \$4,000 to return his house, as well as the homes of his son and daughter. Abdo added,

“I do not have such an amount, and why must I pay to reclaim my own home?”

Only one person successfully regained ownership after the interim government took control of the area on 6 February 2025: Omar Na'sso (61), a Kurdish farmer who had been displaced to Aleppo in 2018. His house had been severely damaged during the shelling associated with Operation Olive Branch and was looted by the al-Shaitat faction, which controlled his village, Shaltah in the Sharran subdistrict, for three months before leaving. The Sultan Murad Division then took over and again seized his home.

Na'sso reported that the looting spread to three houses' furnishings, agricultural tools, and livestock. He also mentioned that the family's farmland had been taken; they had planted wheat there at a cost of seven million SYP (about \$515 at the 2018 official exchange rate) before they were displaced¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁸ Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement, the Syrian Memory Institution, <https://syrianmemory.org/testimonials/entities/5cd0dc00658c9f000109f6b1> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)
See also: "Following Operation Peace Spring, Thousands of Tons of Grain Seized as Spoils of War", STJ, 22 June 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/following-operation-peace-spring-thousands-of-tons-of-grain-seized-as-spoils-of-war/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025)

¹³⁹ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ field researcher on 1 February 2025.

¹⁴⁰ STJ believes that the aforementioned faction is linked to or part of Ahrar al-Sharqiya, which includes members of the al-Shaitat tribe in Deir ez-Zor. See, for example, "Ahrar al-Sharqiya: A Dark Formation and History" [in Arabic] North Press Agency, 23 October 2019, <https://npasyria.com/19152/>

In an interview in April 2025, Nasrin Sheikho (52),¹⁴¹ a Kurdish housewife who had been living with her brother in Aleppo after her husband's death, stated that she returned to Afrin following the fall of the regime due to the high cost of living and her desire to reclaim her house in the al-Mahmoudiya neighborhood of central Afrin. Her home had been seized by an armed member of the Sultan Murad Division, named Abu Hani, who subsequently sold it to someone else. Sheikho explained that she had been unable to claim her home over the past years because entering Afrin required smuggling and significant expenses beyond her means,

“When I returned, I found that a man named Ahmad Abu Maher had taken over my house, locked all the doors, and moved to his village, which I believe is in Idlib. I contacted him by phone to return my house, but he refused and claimed he had bought it from Abu Hani, demanding \$3,500 for its return. When I told him that I did not know him and had never sold the house, he threatened that he would remove the doors and windows if I did not pay. I tried to file a complaint with one of their (SNA) offices, but since I am illiterate and do not even speak Arabic, no one cared about my complaint or my situation. Not a single person came to inspect the house.”

Mustafa Hamo (37),¹⁴² a Kurdish driver displaced to Aleppo, returned to Afrin on 5 February 2025 to try to reclaim an apartment, two shops, and a plot of land that he had been forced to leave in 2018. As of the interview in April 2025, all of these properties were still under the control of armed factions. This included his orchard near the village of Terindi in Afrin center, which had been leased by the economic office of the Jaysh al-Islam to a person from western Aleppo, as well as his two shops, which were controlled by a former member of the Jaysh al-Islam named Aslan.

Hamo described his attempts to appeal to the authorities,

“I filed a complaint with the civil police, and the officer told me to come back in two months. Later, he said to wait until after the holidays when people returned to their areas. Regarding the land, the civil police refused my complaint because a military faction was occupying it. As for my apartment, a family from the Ghouta was living there. I went to see them, but only the women were present. One told me that her husband had gone to the Ghouta and was not available. I went several times, and they always said her husband was not there. When I asked when they would leave, they said after the school holidays. There is no authority I can submit a complaint to.”

As of the interview on 6 April 2025, Samir Shaaban (31),¹⁴³ a Kurdish tailor displaced to the al-Shahba area in northern Aleppo countryside, had not recovered any of his property, neither his house nor his land, in the al-Ashrafiya neighborhood of Afrin. He reported that the civil police had detained him for three days upon his return to Afrin in mid-January 2025.

Regarding his land, which is planted with about 350 olive trees, Shaaban said it is under the control of the economic office of the Ahrar al-Sham faction. They would not even let him inspect the trees and asked for \$3,500 to give up control. Meanwhile, his house is occupied by

¹⁴¹ Interviewed online by an STJ researcher on 13 April 2025.

¹⁴² Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ researcher on 7 April 2025.

¹⁴³ Interviewed face-to-face by an STJ researcher on 6 April 2025.

a displaced family from Eastern Ghouta. They refuse to return it and have even threatened Shaaban, who explained,

“I filed a complaint with the court, and they told me to be patient, that they will leave the house. The first time I asked [the settlers] for the house, they said when we return to our area, we will give you your house. Two weeks later, I came back to request it, and they started threatening me, saying I was with the [PKK] Party and that they would send the military police to arrest me. One of them even told his brother to call their group to detain me. I ended up living in a relative’s house near my neighborhood”.

In a June 2025 report based on collected testimonies, STJ documented a pervasive climate of intimidation against returning displaced persons, which led many to refrain from reclaiming their properties, particularly given the largely symbolic and ineffective presence of the transitional authorities’ General Security apparatus in the area¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴⁴ "Looted Homes and Risky Return: Extortions and Violations Against Returnees to Afrin After the Regime’s Fall", STJ, 22 July 2025, <https://stj-sy.org/en/looted-homes-and-risky-return-extortions-and-violations-against-returnees-to-afrin-after-the-regimes-fall/> (last accessed: 10 September 2025).

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 unflinching 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.

