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**Turkish occupation of Afrin six years on | over 8,700  
kidnappings and arbitrary arrests and over 4,000 other violations  
by Turkish forces and their proxy factions**

**2018.03.18**



المرصد السوري لحقوق الإنسان



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# Introduction

Today, March 18, Syrians mark the sixth anniversary of the occupation of Afrin city and affiliated districts, (aka “Afrin canton”) in the north-western countryside of Aleppo by Turkish forces and their proxy factions and mercenaries. These forces launched a large-scale military operation they called “Olive Branch” on January 2018 and imposed full control of the canton on March 18, 2018.



For six years, Turkish forces and their proxy factions have wreaked havoc in Afrin, after having forced most of the indigenous inhabitants of the Syrian canton to displace and seized their properties. Despite the frequent warnings against the gravity of the current situation in Afrin, Turkish forces and their proxies have been proceeding with their reprehensible practices, violating all human rights and international conventions, amid suspicious inaction by the international community.





**For six years, the indigenous inhabitants of the predominantly-Kurdish enclave have been dreaming to return to their houses after expelling Turkish forces and their proxies. However, this dream has been met by “shameful” silence by relevant international authorities regarding the blatant violations committed in Afrin which has become more akin to a Turkish district where the Turkish flag is raised on institutions and residents are forced to learn the Turkish language and give up their properties for Turkish-backed factions, at a time when Ankara has managed to impose its rules in schools and courthouses as a part of an evil scheme to occupy the canton.**





# Figures and details

The Turkish invasion, fierce military operations and heinous crimes by the factions have forced over 310,000 civilians, equivalent to 56% of the indigenous residents, to flee from their land and homes. Accordingly, residents lost their properties which have been taken over by Turkish-backed factions. While the situation of those residents who have chosen to stay in their areas over displacement has not been better, as they have endured absolute repression and blatant human rights violations, including kidnappings and arbitrary arrests with the aim of collecting ransoms, along with ongoing and daily incidents of seizure of harvest, houses, shops and cars. Through all of these violations, Turkish-backed factions are attempting to force the remaining residents out from Afrin as a part of Turkey's plan of systematic demographic change.

Since January 20, 2018, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) has documented the death of 668 Kurdish civilians in Afrin, including 97 children and 88 women in explosions of IEDs and car bombs, airstrikes and ground bombardment by Turkish forces and extrajudicial executions, while some died under torture in prisons run by Turkish-backed factions.





**Also, SOHR has documented, since the beginning of Turkish occupation of Afrin until the evening of March 17, 2024, the kidnapping and arrest of over 8,729 Kurdish civilians from Afrin, 1,123 of whom remained imprisoned, while the rest were released, after most of them had paid large ransoms which factions of the Turkish-backed “National Army” required.**

**According to SOHR statistics, over 4,476 families from different Syrian provinces were settled in Afrin, after having been forced to displace from their land, as a part of Turkey’s plan to change the demography of Afrin. Under Russian-Turkish agreements, Afrin was handed over to the Turks in return for allowing the Syrian regime to capture eastern Ghouta. The Syrian Observatory has been all along warning against the Turkish plan of systematic demographic change in Afrin since the first day of the Turkish occupation, where over half of the population of Afrin canton has been forced to displace from their homes, while thousands of families from other provinces have been settled in the canton instead; all of this has taken place in full view of the international community which seemed to be indifferent and kept silent.**





# Heinous crimes and blatant violations

**For six years of the Turkish occupation of Afrin, SOHR has documented over 3,986 different violations added to those kidnappings and arbitrary arrests. Here are further details of these violations:**



- **1,246 incidents of seizure of houses, shops and farmlands by members and commanders of Turkish-backed factions in Afrin city and affiliated districts. The seized properties belonged to people who have been forced to displace from Afrin canton due to the “Olive Branch” operation and others of those who have chosen to stay in their areas over displacement.**



- **449 incidents of selling displaced people's houses which had been seized earlier by Turkish-backed factions by force. The houses were sold at low prices and in US dollar in particular.**







- **734 incidents of imposition of levies on civilians by the factions and local councils in return for allowing them to cultivate their land and harvest crops. The requested levies were shares of the harvest and profits or sums of money paid in US dollar and Turkish lira.**



- **1,101 incidents of felling fruit-bearing trees by factions of the Turkish-backed “National Army” with the aim of selling them as fire logs, where tens of thousands of fruit-bearing trees have been cut down.**



- **456 incidents in which militiamen of “National Army” factions assaulted civilians for different reasons.**





# Demographic change

As a part of ongoing efforts to change the demography of Afrin city and surrounding villages and construct new settlements, SOHR sources reported in 2023 that a new residential complex dubbed “Ajnadeen Felasteen” was established under the supervision of Turkish forces and their proxy factions, in Jendires district in Afrin countryside in northern Aleppo. According to SOHR sources, the construction of 40 houses were accomplished and handed over by “Idlib Al-Watan” organisation to members of Ahrar Al-Sham faction which dominates several villages in the district.

The project included the establishment of 200 houses and other services and facilities, including a school, a mosque and a sharia Koranic institute, which the project was implemented on a four-acres-plot of land belonging to two brothers called “Majeed and Murad Mannan” who are from Shitka, were each man owned two acres. The land was taken over by force following the occupation of Afrin in 2018.

It is worth noting that Turkish forces and their proxy factions have intentionally brought displaced people from different Syrian cities and settled them in properties of Afrin's indigenous civilians, after having forced them to leave the canton.





Furthermore, “Ahrar Al-Sharqiyah” faction established a new residential complex overlooking the road between Jendires and Afrin, after having felled 280 trees belonging to two displaced persons from Shitka village in Ma’batli district in Afrin countryside in order to house families loyal to the faction.

According to SOHR sources, the complex supposed to comprise 200 prefabricated houses provided by the Palestinian organisation of “Ajnaddeen Felasteen,” after a contract was signed with “Ahrar Al-Sharqiyah” faction, with Turkey’s consensus. According to this contract, the complex would be under direct supervision of the organisation. It is worth noting that 20 prefabricated houses were sent to the new complex, while the remaining houses would be delivered in batches.





# Conclusion

With the ongoing violations in Afrin, we, at the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), renew our calls for making strict laws putting an end to the systematic practices by all those who are involved in illegal excavation and digging work in the canton's archaeological sites and hills and trading in treasures buried there, and we call upon all international authorities to provide all possible support to maintain the heritage of the region.



SOHR calls upon the international community to interfere immediately to stop violations committed by Turkish forces and their proxies in Afrin, protect its monuments and identity, put an end to demographic change, intensify its efforts to disclose the fate of the kidnapped and bring back displaced families to their areas, work on controlling the security situation and expelling factions. These objectives could potentially be achieved only when the occupying power leaves the region, a political settlement is reached and international resolutions are implemented.

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**SOHR confirms that civilians who have chosen to stay in Afrin, of different segments of Syrian society, are subjected to various violations, including forcible displacement, killing, torturing and looting. In addition, they are prevented from practicing their religious rituals and celebrating their annual festivals; let alone other violations and crimes practiced under the policy of Turkification.**





**We call upon all local and international organisations to cooperate with each other to disclose all serious violations, heinous crimes and reprehensible practices which turned Afrin into a Turkish-speaking “autonomous” district run by laws set by extremist factions**







**المرصد السوري لحقوق الإنسان**  
**Syrian Observatory For Human Rights**