



Amman Center for Human Rights Studies statement on Continued Human Rights Abuses by Turkish Backed Forces in Syria

IN A NUTSHELL

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army continues to commit human rights abuses in Northern Syria and has been accused of ethnic cleansing in the region.

ACHRS condemns the human rights abuses by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army and calls for greater media coverage and accountability for the atrocities taking place in Northern Syria.

Although the conflict in Syria has settled down in recent years, there remain security vacuums in non-government-controlled areas that result in continued hardship for civilians in the area. Groups continue to fight over territory in the north and human rights abuses persist throughout the region including forced disappearances, sexual violence, and ethnic cleansing.

One of the groups taking advantage of the security vacuum in northern Syria is the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) which has been accused of criminality and abuse in Turkish-controlled areas. Members of the SNA have been known to commit human rights abuses as was seen in the murder of Kurdish politician Hevrin Khalaf who was dragged from her vehicle, shot dead, and then beaten by an SNA brigade.

More recently, there have been first-hand accounts coming out of a detention facility in the northern town of al-Rai in which cases of sexual violence, abuse, and suicide are a daily occurrence. Meghan Bodette, founder of The Missing Afrin Women Project, has documented 228 cases of kidnapped women in the SNA territories by brigades, 135 of whom are still missing. Targets of the kidnappings are often Kurdish or Yazidi women who are subjected to sexual violence and abuse in an effort to extract ransom payments that not only benefits SNA brigades, but also allegedly enriches Turkish individuals with ties to the ruling Justice and Development Party.

The SNA took control of Afrin from the Kurdish-led autonomous force whilst claiming that the latter are linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) who are waging an ongoing armed resistance against Turkey. In the time that the SNA has controlled areas in Syria, they have been accused of ethnic cleansing against the Kurdish population, major abuses against Kurdish and Yazidi women in prisons, and the profiteering of land and crops through expropriation. The group is split into multiple brigades that are seemingly autonomous from one another leading to little or no accountability from leaders and the supporting government.

The United Nations has condemned actions by the SNA and has accused them of committing war crimes in the region. While they condemn the actions, there is little being done to address the abuses or even acknowledge them as was seen in a New York Times piece framing the SNA soldiers

as, “all that stand between them (civilians) and potential slaughter at the hands of President Bashar al-Assad’s forces and those of his Russian allies.”

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies denounces the actions by the SNA and calls for more transparent reporting and accountability from the international community. The situation in Afrin and surrounding areas of northern Syria are prime examples of human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing, and war profiteering. The actions of the Turkish-backed forces violate international humanitarian law and deserve more coverage and action from the international community. Holding Turkey accountable for their support of the SNA and inaction in the face of human rights abuses is necessary, especially in an area that has seen so much instability and tragedy over the last decade.