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Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Enforced Disappearance: Women in Afrin

Preamble

Over the past ten years, the Syrian people have suffered by all parties to the conflict, including severe repression and brutal attacks by the Turkish-backed armed factions, which have been involved in committing extrajudicial killings, recruiting children to fight in conflict zones, launching campaigns of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, sometimes accompanied by torturing victims and denying their access to fair trials, in addition to abducting women and human trafficking. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, these mercenaries have detained civilians over alleged charges of belonging to political or armed groups in unknown locations, which rings the alarm bell for the fate of these civilians and their extrajudicial killing. Therefore, we hold Turkey, as an occupying power, responsible for these violations committed by its allies.

In this context, over 200 cases of women abducted by Turkish-backed armed groups have been documented since the invasion of Afrin in March 2018, including 88 women and girls who were reportedly kidnapped in Afrin in 2020. Among them, 35 have allegedly been released after the payment of a ransom, while 51 others remain missing. Seven cases targeted women specifically identified as members of religious minority communities. Five Yazidi women and two Alevi women were reportedly abducted. The Turkish-backed Hamza Division has been reportedly implicated in reports of women kidnapping and gender-based violence since taking control of Afrin in 2018, and is responsible for the most reported incidents.

In this light, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association submits this statement about the missing women of Afrin abducted by Turkish-backed armed factions to the Human Rights Council, with the aim of pressuring the Turkish government to put an end to the ongoing violations committed by allied armed groups in Afrin and to hold those responsible accountable.

Abductions and arbitrary detention of Afrin women by the Turkish-backed armed factions

The Turkish-backed armed factions have been implicated in the kidnappings and arbitrary detention of Afrin women with the aim of displacing and intimidating the indigenous population or getting ransoms. In January 2021, the Turkish-backed armed factions stormed the home of two girls and arrested them without specific charges and their fate remains unknown. In December 2020, 10 women were reported to have been kidnapped and arrested by the Turkish-backed armed factions. Two of them have allegedly been released, one had been murdered and seven are still missing.

In this context, mercenaries of the Sultan Murad Division had abducted a citizen from her home in the al-Umerat Arab clan for alleged links with the Syrian Democratic Forces. Her belongings and money were stolen, including 10 thousand United States of America dollars, 25 million Syrian pounds, her laptop and personal phone, as well as two cars. The investigation confirmed that the victim is working with an aid organization, and no evidence proving her involvement with the Syrian Democratic Forces has been presented. The victim was killed by the mercenaries, as her body was found thrown on a road close to the rural school in the Ancient Afrin on January 19, 2021.

Religious minorities were not spared from the atrocities committed by the Turkish-backed armed factions. On December 4, 2020, Feylaq al-Sham arrested a Yazidi woman from the Yazidi village of Basofan, in the occupied Afrin, without a specific charge. She was subjected to torture in a prison belonging to the faction located in the village of Isk before she was transferred to an unknown location, and her fate remains unknown. In November 2020, the Turkish-backed factions carried out 11 kidnappings and enforced disappearances

against women in Afrin, one was released and 10 others are still missing. On 23 November, four women were arrested from Baflorê village in Jinderes over alleged links with the Syrian Democratic Forces, and are being held in Jinderes on a ransom of 2,000 Turkish lira each.

By chance, detainees were found in the Hamza faction secret detention centers

On May 29, 2020, a video clip went viral on social media from the headquarters of the Turkish-backed Hamza faction, while it was stormed by armed men and civilians. The video showed eight women who were detained by the armed faction with a child. The storming took place after a member of the Hamza faction, on May 28, 2020, threw a grenade into a store belongs to a civilian forcibly displaced from Eastern Ghouta, killing two civilians, including one child, and wounding others. Triggered by this incident, residents poured out into street in protests over the repeated attacks against citizens and demanding the extradition of those involved.

Although the video showed the women being released, their whereabouts remain unknown, and their identities, names and reasons of detention are also mysterious. There are conflicting and terrifying news that they have been handed over to the Hamza faction, which is notorious for its unspeakable violations, such as theft, kidnapping, killing and terrorizing civilians. In conjunction with the disappearance of the women, activists were able to document the names of two women who appeared in the video, who are "Haifa Al-Jasem" from Afrin, who has been detained since 2018, and "Rukan Manla" from the town of Juweik, who has been detained since July 2019, which means that at least one of the detainees has spent two years being held in a military faction headquarters without her family knowing her location, the reasons for her arrest or the circumstances she went through.

Recommendations

At last, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association condemns the unjustified discrimination between human beings on the basis of ethnicity, religion, region or sex, and holds the de facto authorities in Afrin, topped by the Turkish forces, responsible for the release and safety of the detained women. The factions of the National Army, or the military or civilian police, cannot commit similar violations were it not for Turkey's tolerance. We also call on all local and international human rights and humanitarian organizations and bodies, as well as international parties influencing the Syrian file, to put further pressure on the Turkish government to stop human rights violations and arbitrary arrests in areas under the control of its forces in northern Syrian Arab Republic. We also call on the Turkish government to act urgently and pressure its forces, the National Army, and the military and civil police in the city of Afrin to:

- Disclose the whereabouts and identity of the detained women, and release them immediately.
- Open an investigation into the reasons for their detention and their conditions during the period of detention, and to hold the responsible accountable.
- Immediately release all detainees in the headquarters of the military factions, especially women and children, and hold the perpetrators accountable.
- Stop the arrests in Afrin without an official warrant issued by a competent judicial authority.
- End cases of detention without trial.
- Allow impartial organizations to have access to all detention centers and inspect the detainees' humanitarian conditions, especially women.

- Explain and clarify the legal bases on which the arrests and apprehensions are made, and publish them in a clear and understandable language for all residents in Afrin.
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