

## **Syria: Independent International Commission of Inquiry Reports Human Rights Violations in Afrin**

*The commission confirmed that violations by the opposition's Syrian National Army in Afrin continue, reporting torture and ill-treatment against Kurdish detainees.*

On 13 March 2023, the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria issued its [report](#) on the status of human rights and relevant violations in the country between 1 July and 31 December 2022.

The 44-page report builds on 467 direct interviews, carried out physically or online, covering various forms of human rights violations perpetrated by all parties to the conflict in Syria. In addition, the report extensively documents violations committed by the opposition's Syrian National Army (SNA) factions in North-West Syria, especially in the Afrin region.

The report verifies that members of armed groups such as the SNA and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham committed the war crime of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Additionally, it stresses that rape and other forms of sexual violence in the Syrian government's detention facilities amount to crimes against humanity.

The report also mentions that the Turkish-backed SNA has been involved in numerous human rights violations in Afrin and northern Syria, detaining civilians arbitrarily and subjecting detainees to torture and ill-treatment. The report highlights: "**Arrests and detention by SNA brigades and the SNA military police continued. Kurdish detainees were routinely questioned on their alleged ties to the Kurdish People's Protection Units or SDF.**"

The report also documents that Turkish-backed armed groups have interrogated the detainees without legal justification or hiring them lawyers. The report says: "**Detainees were transferred between different SNA brigades, deprived of legal.**" Furthermore, the report documents torture, beatings, and ill-treatment "**Torture and ill-treatment were documented in several SNA facilities, including military police prisons in Raju and Ra's al-Ayn, and a prison operated by the Sultan Murad Division in Hawar Killis.**"

The report mentions the killing of the Kurdish lawyer Luqman Hamid Hanan in the Civil Police prison, highlighting that: "**In some cases, such practices led to the death of detainees, including one in the custody of Ahrar al-Sham. Another detainee, a Kurdish lawyer with a health condition, reportedly died in the custody of the civil police in Afrin in December. Photographs of his body showed bruises.**"

The report also documents cases of property seizure, whereby perpetrators threatened owners with imprisonment and disappearance if they claimed rights over their properties, often targeting women as the most vulnerable group, especially women who live alone. The report says: **“An older widowed woman described how a senior Faylaq al-Sham member confiscated her olive crops in October 2022, after another member of the same group had confiscated her home in 2018. The group claimed that, as a widow, she did not need a home just for herself.”**

Moreover, the report refers to the Turkish role in prison interrogations: **“The presence of Turkish officials during interrogations, some involving torture or illtreatment of detainees.”** It stresses Turkey’s legal obligations under such circumstances, affirming that: **“Türkiye is bound by its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, including to prevent torture when present.”**

The report also includes a set of recommendations pressing the international community and countries supporting the parties in the Syrian conflict to take urgent steps to stop documented violations and **“to ensure that those responsible for violations are held accountable, ensure non-repetition and make their findings public.”**

In the recommendations, the commission also calls for an immediate cessation of torture, **“To cease torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including sexual and gender-based violence, in all places of detention; release those arbitrarily detained.”**

**Cover photo description:** Chairman of the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria during a press conference. Photo Source: United Nations.