

## **Syria/Afrin: Continuing fears that the Yazidis will be forced to convert to Islam**

*Reports of forcing two Yazidis men to convert to Islam revived fears that the few remaining Yazidis would be forced to convert to Islam*

Reports that showed two Yazidis men "converting to Islam" in the presence of a sheikh of western Aleppo, revived fears that the few remaining Yazidis in Afrin would be forced to convert to Islam. It also reminded the Afrin community by the widespread violations that the Kurds and Yazidis in Afrin had been subjected since the Turkish Operation 'Olive Branch' in 2018.

[A video published](#) at the end of March 2023, showed Sheikh "Ahmed Zyouk" was talking with two Yazidis citizens from the "Qibar" village of Afrin city center; Haider Aref and Sheikho Aref, before they declared their conversion to Islam and said the Islamic shahada.

[Local activists](#) later stated that the two men have lived in the area for decades, and they were arrested by an armed opposition faction after the invasion of the area by the Turkish forces. Then they asked them about Islamic prayer and whether they knew it or not, and they replied that they were followers of the Yazidi religion but they were forced to pray at that time. They were kidnapped several times after that, and their homes were stolen and the threats continued against them.

The Kurds in Afrin region in general and the Yazidis in particular, have been subjected to continuous violations by the Turkish-backed Syrian armed factions since the occupation of Afrin in 2018. "Jamila," a Yazidi woman from the village of Kimar who was forcibly displaced from Afrin, says in her interview with the Lelun Association: "Our Yazidis families are suffering from a

state of suffocation that prevents them from practicing their religious rites compared to the pre-occupation period. So people hide their religious beliefs and restrict the practice of their rites and rituals in order to avoid any harm that might befall them at the hands of the extremist factions who are standing guard against them," as she said.

Mrs. Gule Jafar, a member of the "Ezidi Union of Afrin" spoke to the Lelun Association for victims of the violations that the Yazidis are subjected to violation in Afrin region, saying: "Since the Turkish state occupied the Afrin region, the Yazidis have been faced many pressures socially, culturally and religiously aspects. In 2018, members of the National Army planted an explosive bomb in the house of a resident in Qibar village and two people died; Abdo Hamo and Fouad Naser".

The Yazidis are exposed to a series of violations, including the looting of their property and the destruction of their religious shrines. A group of people [cut down two blessed trees](#) in the shrine of "Qibar" village, known as "Chalkhana", which is an important shrine for the followers of the Yazidi religion because of its important status for them. Members of the armed factions in Baflon, Qibar and Basofan villages also destroyed [the graves of the Yazidis villagers](#), as their religious holidays approached. The "Jaysh al-Islam" faction that controls the Turanda village stole [the door of a Yazidi cemetery](#) in the village. Gunmen affiliated with the Hamza Division imposed royalties in the village of "Burj Abdalo" in the center of Afrin, an amount of five thousand dollars in order [not to force the Yazidis people](#) to convert to Islam.

In order to restrict the practice of the Yazidis of their religious rites and rituals, the armed men of the Syrian National Army and The Local Council in Afrin immediately after they took control of the area, built an elementary school by the name of "[Imam and Khateeb School](#)" funded by the Kuwaiti association "Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity" and the "White Hands" Association

on the ruins of the previously headquarters "The Yazidis Union" in the city of Afrin after they destruct the statue of Zardasht and Lalash al-Nourani - sacred symbols of the followers of the Yazidi religion. In addition, a Yazidi house in the Yazidi Basoufan village was [converted into a mosque](#) by the "Sham Legion" faction.

According to a secret statistic "[unofficial](#)" conducted by the Ezidina Foundation, the number of Yazidis in the Afrin region was estimated at about (35,000) people before it controlled by the Turkish forces. So that, their numbers decreased to less than a thousand people after the Turkish occupation of the region. The Yazidis are distributed among twenty-three villages, most of whose inhabitants are Yazidis, and there are villages in which Muslims and Yazidis live together. The region contains nineteen shrines of their own.

The Lelun Association has concerns about the fate of the Yazidis remaining inside the region due to the continued harassment by the armed factions and the seizure of their property and forcing them to convert to Islam. Therefore, we call on the international organizations concerned with human rights to shed light on the issues of violations related to the Yazidis in the Afrin region.