

" The Forgotten Prisons "

When the Legacy of Assad's Dungeons Reaches the Detention Centers of the Syrian
National Army



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Table of Contents:

1. Executive Summary.....	2-3
2. Investigation Methodology.....	3-4
3. Background.....	4-5
4. Patterns of Detention.....	6-9
4.1. Detention following return to faction-controlled areas	
4.2. Arbitrary detention of civilians and women under fabricated charges	
5. Systematic Torture Practices.....	9-13
5.1. Psychological torture and humiliation	
5.2. Violations against women	
6. Legal Opinion.....	13-15
7. Recommendations	15-16
8. Conclusion	17

1. Executive Summary

This report documents serious human rights violations committed by factions affiliated with the Syrian National Army (SNA) in detention centers under their control in northwestern Syria, particularly following their takeover of the Afrin region, northwestern Syria, in March 2018. The report is based on verified testimonies from 10 individuals—either former detainees or relatives of detainees—who were subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, and other abuses.

The testimonies reveal a systematic pattern of violations, including arbitrary arrests, physical and psychological torture, sexual harassment and violence, extortion, coerced confessions, and enforced disappearances. They also point to collusion between various armed factions and Turkish intelligence, as detainees are often transferred between multiple detention facilities in Afrin, Azaz, al-Bab, and at times into Turkish territory.

The report highlights numerous cases of home raids, arbitrary arrests at checkpoints, and detentions during forced displacement operations. Detainees are frequently accused without evidence, facing charges such as “collaboration with the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES)” or “affiliation with the People's Protection Units (YPG),” which are commonly used as pretexts for arrest and financial extortion.

Documented methods of torture include beatings with various instruments, electric shocks, the Blanco method (the detainee is suspended from his wrists by a rope on a track connected to a pulley and raised until only the tips of his toes touch the ground.), deprivation of food and water, verbal abuse, and psychological torture. Detainees are also subjected to constant death threats. In the case of female detainees, the report records incidents of rape, sexual harassment, and violations of privacy in bathrooms and wash areas.

The report also details a systematic extortion scheme, where families are forced to pay ransoms ranging from several hundred to tens of thousands of US dollars in exchange for the release of detainees. In many cases, the detainees' property is also confiscated. The testimonies frequently describe detainees as being treated as "spoils" to be traded for financial gain.

Furthermore, the report sheds light on the severe psychological and physical consequences endured by survivors following their release, including permanent disabilities, acute psychological disorders, loss of speech, sleep disturbances, persistent fear, and deep trauma that prevents them from returning to a normal life.

In conclusion, the report finds that these practices constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. It underscores the urgent need to hold those responsible accountable.

2. Methodology

This report is based on a research methodology centered on the collection of direct testimonies from 10 individuals, including six former detainees and four relatives of individuals currently or previously held in detention centers in Afrin, Azaz, al-Bab, and other areas under the control of factions affiliated with the Turkish-backed SNA.

Witness selection criteria: Our team ensured diversity within the sample of interviewees according to the following criteria:

- Period of detention: Witnesses were selected based on experiences of detention (or those of their relatives) occurring between March 2018 (beginning of Afrin's takeover) and December 2024 (the SNA's assault on the Shahba region).
- Detention locations: Witnesses had been detained or had relatives detained in various facilities, including Maarateh Prison, Rajo Prison, Hawar Kilis Prison, and detention centers in Azaz and al-Bab.
- Demographic diversity: The sample included five men and five women, all of whom are native Kurdish residents of the Afrin region.
- Nature of relationship: For relatives of detainees, only direct family members (such as spouses, siblings, children, or parents) were interviewed, provided they had maintained regular contact with the detainee during or after their detention.

Interview timing and procedure: Interviews were conducted between November 2024 and February 2025.

Informed consent and confidentiality: The team obtained informed consent from all participants, which included:

- Explicit approval for the use of their testimonies in this report.
- Full disclosure about the publication process (including digital release and distribution to Syrian and international human rights organizations).

- Explanation of identity protection measures, such as the use of pseudonyms and the omission of identifying details.
- The right to withdraw from the research at any time prior to publication.

Verification of information: The research team applied a rigorous verification process, which involved:

- Cross-referencing different accounts of the same incidents or detention centers.
- Analyzing shared details among independently collected testimonies.
- Requesting supporting evidence where possible (e.g., medical records, photos of injuries).
- Verifying timelines and comparing them with media reports and prior documentation.

Psychosocial considerations: Special attention was given to the psychological and social dimensions of the interviews, particularly due to the trauma associated with detention and torture. The team:

- Taking into account the psychological and social dimensions of detention and torture experiences.
- Ensured a safe and supportive environment for testimony.
- Sought to prevent re-traumatization during the recounting of painful experiences.
- Referred survivors to available mental health and medical services when needed.

Challenges and limitations: The team encountered several challenges, including:

- Difficulty accessing faction-controlled areas for direct fieldwork, reflecting the region's closure and restrictions on human rights monitoring.
- Security concerns among witnesses, who feared retaliation against themselves or their relatives still living in faction-held territories.
- Inability to verify some details due to the lack of formal documentation or access to detention centers.

3. Background

On March 18, 2018, Turkish forces and their affiliated SNA factions took control of the Afrin region in the far northwest of Syria following a military operation known as "Operation Olive Branch". This offensive resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of indigenous Kurdish residents, who fled primarily to the Shahba region in Aleppo northern countryside, which they considered a temporary refuge. However, this initial displacement was followed by a second wave in late December 2024, when Turkey-backed armed factions launched a new assault dubbed "Operation Dawn of Freedom". Targeting areas such as Tel Rifaat and Deir Jamal, these operations led to the collapse of the local defenses established by the "Afrin Liberation Forces," forcing many of the previously displaced residents to flee once again, this time toward eastern Syria and other areas.

Since March 2018, these factions have imposed full control over Afrin, establishing parallel administrative and security structures, including detention centers and military courts. The period that followed was marked by repeated reports of human rights abuses, particularly arbitrary arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances.

Afrin witnessed large-scale arrest campaigns primarily targeting the original Kurdish population on various pretexts, most notably accusations of “collaboration with the Autonomous Administration,” which had governed the region before the Turkish-backed takeover. Returnees to the region were also targeted despite being subjected to so-called “reconciliation processes” and forced to obtain “clearance certificates” that ultimately did not protect them from arbitrary detention.

Over time, a complex network of both formal and informal detention facilities developed in the region. These include well-known centers such as the Maaratah Central Prison, the notorious Rajo Prison (often referred to as “the Black Prison”), Hawar Kilis Prison, and the Agriculture Prison in al-Bab. In addition, many private homes and confiscated buildings were repurposed by the factions as clandestine detention sites.

As these factions expanded their control to other parts of northern Syria, the same patterns of abuse persisted. New cases were documented during the December 2024 assault on the Shahba region, under the banner of “Operation Dawn of Freedom”, which coincided with a campaign by the new Damascus government dubbed “Operation Deterrence of Aggression”, aimed at “liberating Syria.” Many civilians were detained during this period, particularly those unable to flee alongside convoys heading toward northeastern Syria during the second wave of forced displacement.

Following the release of some detainees and the return of some displaced persons to Afrin, it became possible to collect testimonies that shed light on the ongoing and systematic nature of human rights abuses in detention centers across the region.

The testimonies documented in this report reveal a deeply troubling resemblance between the methods of detention and torture previously employed by the Syrian government’s security apparatus and those currently practiced by Turkish-backed factions. Tactics such as arbitrary arrest, systematic torture, enforced disappearance, financial extortion, and the degradation of detainees appear to have been inherited from one regime to another—despite public claims of systemic and political change.

This continuity is evident in the shared use of torture techniques such as Blanco method, electric shocks, secret prisons, coerced confessions, intentional starvation, and denial of medical care. Similar patterns also appear in the silencing of dissenting voices, intimidation of journalists and activists, and widespread fear instilled among the civilian population.

Such parallels raise serious questions about the entrenched culture of impunity in Syria. Despite the change in power structures, human rights conditions have not improved. Instead, the same abuses persist—albeit under different slogans and banners. The primary difference is that the previous regime’s violations were more widely documented, whereas current abuses take place under a media blackout and with strict restrictions on the activities of human rights organizations in the region.

4. Patterns of Arrest

Recent human rights reports indicate systematic patterns of arrest in areas under the control of Turkish-backed factions in northern Syria. According to a report entitled [Afrin: The Annual Report on Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture During 2024](#), published by the Hevdesti/Synergy Association for Victims in January 2025, a total of 527 individuals—including 15 children and 41 women—were documented as having been arrested by factions of the SNA in Afrin during 2024 alone. The report also highlights the involvement of Turkish intelligence forces in carrying out and overseeing these violations.

The patterns documented in that report align closely with the testimonies collected by the Lelun team for this report, reinforcing evidence of a systematic campaign of abuses targeting civilians in Turkish-backed areas of control.

The collected testimonies reveal consistent patterns of arrest carried out by armed factions in Afrin. These include home raids, arrests at military checkpoints, summonses that result in detention, and the arrest of relatives as a means of pressuring individuals wanted by the factions.

One of the most detailed and harrowing testimonies came from Shar (a pseudonym), a Kurdish woman who endured months of detention in multiple facilities. After being displaced by Operation Olive Branch, Shar and her husband attempted to return to Afrin two months later as part of a plan to migrate to Europe. Their ordeal began when her husband was abducted, followed by her own arrest.

Shar was transferred between several detention centers and subjected to various forms of physical and psychological torture, including rape and humiliation. Her testimony provides a chilling account of the systematic abuses against female detainees in particular, including her attempted suicide and her eyewitness account of the deaths of other detainees under torture. She also described in detail the process of being transferred between different prisons.

In December 2024, the Shahba region witnessed a military offensive by SNA factions, which led to the arrest of numerous civilians who were unable to evacuate. "Alan" (a pseudonym), a Kurdish man who directly witnessed the arrests in the Shahba region, provided detailed documentation of the fate of three civilians detained during the takeover. He described the methods and conditions of the arrests, stating: "On December 1, 2024, the SNA launched an assault on the Shahba region. Four vehicles that had fallen behind the convoy heading toward Fafin and onward to northeastern Syria were stopped in the town of Tel Rifaat at a checkpoint operated by factions under the Joint Force Command. The fighters assured the passengers they would not be harmed and told them to return to Tel Rifaat."

Alan, who lived in a nearby house and witnessed the events, added that the arrests occurred after the individuals had returned home: "That evening, after the group had returned to the house where they were temporarily staying following their forced displacement, an armed group raided the house, arrested them, and confiscated their belongings, including a car, a tractor, and 15 sheep."

He further noted that the arrests were part of a mass detention campaign, stating: "These individuals were among approximately 400 civilians who were detained in a school in the town of Tel Rifaat."

4.1. Arrest upon return to faction-controlled areas

In a similar context, Neshtiman (a pseudonym), a 40-year-old Kurdish woman, recounts the painful ordeal her family endured following the arrest of her husband. The couple had been living in the town of

Tel Rifaat with her ailing father after being forcibly displaced from their home in Afrin. When the military offensive on the region began in December 2024, they were unable to flee due to her father's critical health condition. Neshtiman provided a detailed testimony about the devastating effects of the torture her husband endured in detention, which left him with permanent physical disabilities that profoundly altered the course of their family's life.

Speaking to a Lelun team, Neshtiman described the circumstances surrounding her husband's arrest after armed factions entered Tel Rifaat and the events that followed until his release: "We were among the few who could not leave. My father was bedridden, and there was not enough time to join the convoy. That evening, someone knocked on our door. When we opened it, an armed man stood there, asking for our names and the reason we remained in the area. Within moments, they took my husband to Azaz, where he was held by the military police for five days."

Neshtiman added that the "clearance certificate" her husband later obtained failed to protect him from re-arrest: "After his release, my husband was issued a 'clearance certificate' guaranteeing his safety upon returning to Afrin. I went ahead with our children and my father, waiting for him to join us once his status was settled. But just two days after he entered Afrin, the military police summoned him under the pretext of routine procedures—and he was subsequently transferred to Maarateh Prison."

4.2. Arrests of civilians and women and stigmatization through ready charges

Naza (a pseudonym) is one of the women who was personally subjected to arrest in April 2020, following her return to the Afrin region. She was detained by the Military Police on charges of previously working with the former Autonomous Administration and held in Ma'ratta Prison. Naza recounts her harrowing experience during the four months and ten days of her detention, testifying to serious violations committed against female detainees—including being denied contact with her orphaned children, which led to a nervous breakdown. She also documented incidents of harassment and rape that she witnessed during her detention and confirmed that her release was only secured after her family paid a ransom.

Her testimony aligns with a documented pattern found in the February 2024 report by the Syrian Network for Human Rights titled *Unshaken Voices: Syrian Women Facing the Ordeal of Arrest and Post-Release Challenges*, which documented no fewer than 10,060 incidents of sexual violence against women between March 2011 and the end of 2023, committed by parties to the conflict and dominant forces in Syria.

The report emphasized that SNA factions "used sexual violence as a discriminatory tool to blackmail victims and their families." This reflects Naza's experience. The report further noted that "the ordeal of arbitrary detention does not end with release. Its impact extends well beyond, as released women continue to face numerous violations," a reality mirrored in Naza's ongoing suffering post-release. She recounts: "I was arrested upon returning to Afrin in April 2020 by the Military Police, and was later held in Maarateh Prison," she says. "The charge against me was that I had worked as an employee with the former local administration in the area."

In many cases, individuals are arrested on allegations of "collaborating with the AANES" or "working with Kurdish forces," even when no evidence exists. Berivan (a pseudonym), the wife of a detainee who has been imprisoned for two and a half years, shares a deeply emotional account of her husband's ongoing ordeal.

She traces his painful journey through four different prisons, beginning in Azaz, passing through Turkey and the infamous Rajo Prison—known as "the Black Prison"—and finally to Maarateh Central Prison. She

details the brutal torture he endured, especially during his time in Turkish intelligence custody, and the severe psychological effects he still suffers. Despite being a victim of forced displacement from Afrin, Berivan has continually followed up on his case and covered the costs of his treatment and detention. She says: "My husband was arrested two and a half years ago in the town of Maryamin, in the Sharran subdistrict of Afrin, by an armed group affiliated with the Military Police. He was subjected to harsh treatment and torture, particularly when held by Turkish security forces in Hawar Kilis Prison. The torture included beatings, electric shocks, humiliation, and many other brutal methods. He was severely beaten on the head. The charge against him was collaboration with the AANES."

In the case of Barzan (a pseudonym), who witnessed the mass arrest of three members of a single family in February 2024, his testimony provides detailed documentation of the methods of arrest and extortion used by the Military Police in Afrin.

Barzan describes how individuals were taken from their homes in the Ashrafiyeh neighborhood, charged with ready charges, and subjected to ransom negotiations via intermediaries. He also documents cases of vehicle and property confiscation and notes a recurring pattern in which detainees are never brought before official courts or judges throughout their detention. He explains: "The charge of collaborating with the AANES is a well-known and ever-ready accusation," he says. "It wasn't exactly the case with me, but they accused me anyway, despite everyone knowing that I only work in livestock trading."

There are also documented cases of people being arrested simply for inquiring about the fate of detained relatives at police stations. Barzan recounts: "He was arrested the very next day when he went to the Military Police station to ask about the whereabouts of his uncle and cousin, and why they had been detained."

Several testimonies also highlight a repeated pattern of re-arresting the same individual. This is evident in the case of Rebar (a pseudonym), a survivor of extreme torture who was detained three times consecutively since April 2018. He provides a chilling and detailed testimony of the torture methods used in the detention centers run by armed factions. Rebar was arrested by the Northern Brigade on various charges, including weapons possession and collaboration with the Autonomous Administration.

He was transferred between several detention centers and subjected to some of the harshest forms of torture, including a mock execution and being dumped in front of his house after his captors assumed he had died from the torture. He miraculously survived but remained in a coma for 20 days in the hospital and experienced temporary memory loss after regaining consciousness. Rebar recalls in detail: "I was first arrested on April 10, 2018. Then I was detained a second time just five days after my release. The third arrest came less than three days later."

He adds that each time the charges were different: "Weapons possession, working with hostile Kurdish groups, and even providing information about the house owner whose home they had converted into a headquarters in the village of Avrāza."

Another recurring pattern of arrests is linked to property disputes between native residents and displaced individuals brought to the area during Operation Olive Branch. As Barzan recounts: "[One person] was previously arrested due to a dispute with a displaced individual over a water well he owned. The newcomer wanted to seize and profit from the well without paying any rent. The man was arrested at the time by the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction in October 2022."

Notably, Ahrar al-Sharqiya is an armed faction under the umbrella of the Turkish-backed SNA. It was established in 2016 by fighters primarily from eastern Syria (Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa) and relocated to

Afrin after Turkish forces and allied factions took control in March 2018. The group is currently based in the Sharran subdistrict and parts of central Afrin.

Hanan (a pseudonym) describes the torture of an acquaintance—a 45-year-old Kurdish history teacher arrested after returning to Afrin in June 2018. She recounts in graphic detail the systematic torture that left him paralyzed on one side of his body. She also provides valuable information on violations against female detainees, including deaths resulting from deliberate medical neglect in prison. Hanan recalls: "Guards at Hawar Kilis Prison insulted a prisoner and said to him: 'Act out for us how you had sex with your wife with another inmate—what did she wear for you, and what was her body size?'"

She adds further details of abuse: "When women showered in their solitary cells, guards would open the windows to mock them. After showering, the women were taken to a small courtyard in the prison to 'sun-dry' their clothes—while they waited in their undergarments, mocked and ridiculed by the guards."

Naza also documented a case of rape during her detention: "A girl from Qamishli—a law student who had come to northwest Syria intending to travel to Turkey—was raped by some of the guards at Hawar Kilis Prison during her time there."

These recurring patterns reflect a systematic policy by armed factions to target civilians, especially the original inhabitants of the area, instilling fear and intimidation, while using arrests as a tool for financial gain through extortion and ransom demands.

The systematic nature of these violations is further corroborated by the December 2024 [Missing Justice](#) report published by the Hevdesti/Synergy Association. It documented a "consistent and ongoing pattern of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture perpetrated by the SNA factions with direct support and funding from the Turkish government."

The report revealed that most arbitrary arrests were based on "dubious allegations of collaboration with the Autonomous Administration or the Syrian Democratic Forces," and that such charges were routinely used as a means of coercion and extortion, with many detainees released only after paying ransom.

It also highlighted how arbitrary detention played a role in the forced displacement of original inhabitants. Some victims reported that the primary purpose of these practices was to compel them to abandon their homes and properties, which were later confiscated and looted. The report documented that in eight verified cases, victims were robbed of amounts ranging between \$1,000 and \$10,000—over \$42,000 in total—through direct theft during arrests, home raids, and ransom payments demanded from detainees' families.

The systematic nature of these violations was also affirmed by the [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria in its 2020 report](#). The commission concluded that such abuses—including abduction, detention, extortion, torture, rape, and property confiscation—have been consistently committed in Afrin without accountability and reflect a "deliberate and sustained policy implemented by armed groups reported on and executed repeatedly."

5. Systematic Torture Practices

Testimonies of the victims indicate the existence of a systematic method of torture and extortion in detention centers in Afrin. This system typically begins with arbitrary arrest and confiscation of property,

followed by an initial interrogation marked by intense torture. Detainees report being subjected to beatings and electric shocks, forced to give coerced confessions, and compelled to sign blank documents.

This is followed by financial extortion of detainees' families, usually conducted through intermediaries who negotiate ransoms ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars. Detainees are frequently transferred between various detention centers under degrading conditions, culminating in perfunctory legal proceedings and the forced filming of detainees denying they were tortured.

The process ends either in release—typically after the ransom is paid and often accompanied by permanent physical disabilities and severe psychological trauma—or prolonged detention lasting years in cases where families are unable to pay. This integrated system reflects clear coordination among various armed factions and entities overseeing the detention centers.

Beatings are carried out with various tools that leave severe marks on detainees' bodies. One survivor, Rebar, recounts: "I was subjected to the worst kinds of torture using all manner of tools—beaten with hoses, cables, and clubs embedded with spiked protrusions."

The hoses referred to in the testimonies are typically rigid plastic pipes used in plumbing, locally known as "al-Akhdar al-Ibrahimi". They leave deep bruises when used for beating. The spiked clubs are made of metal or hard plastic and have sharp protrusions that cause cuts and tears in the skin and underlying tissue, often leaving permanent scars.

Rebar details a horrific instance of mass beating: "The interrogator ordered the guards to torture me until I confessed to the charges. Seventeen guards carried me, threw me into a room, and beat and tortured me brutally for over an hour—until I lost consciousness."

Electric shocks are among the most frequently used torture methods. Hanan, describing the torture of a Kurdish history teacher she knew, said: "He was severely electrocuted until he suffered partial paralysis. He used to teach history in Kurdish before displacement. They accused him of giving political lessons, even though he had no political affiliations."

Berivan (a pseudonym) corroborates the same treatment in recounting her husband's ordeal: "He endured harsh treatment and torture, particularly while in the custody of Turkish security forces. They beat him, electrocuted him, insulted him, and subjected him to multiple torture methods."

Shar Bilal adds: "I saw them torturing young men in various ways, especially with electric shocks."

Another severe torture method is known as Blanco method. Rebar, who was tortured three times since April 2018, offers a detailed description from his own experience: "The Blanco method means being handcuffed and having the legs tied to a hoist, lifting the body off the ground with the legs above and the head facing downward, without the head touching the ground."

He continues: "They hung me on the hoist and began beating me, slamming my body against the wall with all their force until I lost consciousness."

Jwan (a pseudonym) recounts the harrowing experience of a relative who survived nearly two years of detention in Maarateh Prison: "The torture left him in a permanent state of psychosis. He became terrified of anyone with a beard and burst into tears upon hearing Quranic recitations—because they tortured him while playing certain verses as a psychological tool."

Jwan notes that Blanco method was commonly used: "He was tortured with electric shocks, suspended upside down, and subjected to cold water." Detainees were routinely denied basic healthcare, which severely impacted their health. Jwan adds: "They didn't allow him to receive medical treatment during his detention—unless his family paid them."

He also describes how religion was weaponized as a tool of psychological torture: "My relative was humiliated in Maarateh Prison. They called him an infidel who deserved to be burned. They burned his body by forcing him to stand on a hot metal plate, labeling him as godless and 'from the fire.' They extorted him by playing Quranic verses while electrocuting him, pulling his nails, and beating him, all under the pretense that he deserved such punishment as an infidel."

Jwan concludes: "He was beaten on the head so severely that he now suffers from full-blown psychosis and mania."

Hunger and deprivation of water were also used as deliberate forms of abuse. Hanan describes what a friend endured upon returning to Afrin in June 2018: "He was starved, denied water, insulted, and not allowed to use the toilet. Worse, they made him drink large quantities of water and then denied him peeing to relieve himself." Shar recalls a similar experience: "We couldn't drink water because they wouldn't let us use the bathroom."

While the report primarily focuses on direct testimonies from survivors, second-hand accounts were also documented. Hanan, based on her work documenting abuses in the region, shares one such account: "One detainee died in the Agriculture Prison in al-Bab. His body had been eaten away by worms and insects due to deep wounds and filth in the prison. He received almost no medical care. After his death, they carried him and dumped his body into a nearby well that already contained several corpses of former detainees."

Although such accounts are difficult to verify independently, they are consistent with the pattern of medical neglect documented in various independent sources, including the 2024 report Missing Justice, which recorded similar instances of deliberate medical neglect that led to permanent injury or death.

Shar also describes unconventional torture methods designed to inflict maximum pain: "They tortured the young men using electric shocks, needles dipped in citric acid poked under their nails, slashing their backs with blades, and pouring vinegar and lemon salt into the wounds."

She adds: "They called in someone named Azrael to beat me. He slapped my face, kicked my head until it hit the wall. I began vomiting, lost bladder control, and bled from my mouth and nose for an hour straight."

5.1. Psychological torture and humiliation

Testimonies from former detainees reveal a comprehensive system of psychological torture and humiliation. This includes forcing detainees to witness the torture of others, exploiting religious symbols—such as the Qur'an—during acts of torture, which in some cases led to lasting psychological trauma. Detainees were also subjected to degrading acts such as being forced to drink their own urine, simulate intimate relations in front of guards, and, in the case of female detainees, endure sexual harassment, surveillance while bathing, and coercive filming while semi-naked.

Other documented abuses include forced nudity in video recordings that show detainees expressing gratitude to their torturers, deprivation of privacy while using toilets, continuous death threats, and

accusations of blasphemy and atheism used to justify the mistreatment. These abuses left deep and often permanent psychological scars, with some survivors developing chronic psychosis, mutism, or irrational fear of bearded individuals.

Rebar recounts one episode of psychological torture: "They ordered me to lie face-down and recite the shahada [Islamic declaration of faith], telling me my execution time had come. They all began shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and fired their weapons heavily around me. For a few moments, I was certain I was going to die—only to hear them laughing and mocking me."

Survivor accounts consistently describe a pattern of coerced, dehumanizing acts. Detainees were denied access to restrooms and forced to urinate into containers inside their cells, later being compelled to drink their own urine under threat of execution.

Some detainees were forced to mimic sexual acts in front of guards, pretending to demonstrate intimacy with their spouses. Female detainees were compelled to strip down to their underwear during forced filming or while being left in the sun for extended periods. They were subjected to harassment and were watched while bathing.

In addition to these abuses, detainees were forced into labor, including washing the guards' clothes, cooking their meals, and chopping firewood. Many were coerced into recording videos in which they praised their captors, a practice that represents a systematic violation of human dignity and leaves profound psychological damage.

Rebar describes the experience of being forced to drink his own urine: "They wouldn't allow us to use toilets or bathrooms. We were forced to urinate into containers and then made to drink our own urine under the threat of death."

Shar corroborates this with a similar account: "One time, a young man urinated in a container in the cell. When the guards found out, they forced him to drink it."

In the most extreme cases, deliberate acts of mutilation and disfigurement were documented. Neshtiman describes her husband's condition upon his release: "When I saw him, I was in shock and horror. He no longer resembled the man I knew. His body was as frail as that of an eight-year-old child. His features were filled with fear; his limbs were trembling. Both of his feet were wrapped in white gauze. I saw burn marks on his body and missing teeth. When I unwrapped his feet, I found that eight of his toes had been amputated, and the soles of his feet had been completely skinned, exposing the bone."

She adds that her husband had "become mute" as a result of the torture and was suffering from "neurological paralysis, only able to eat through a feeding tube inserted into his abdomen."

5.2. Violations against women

Testimonies from female detainees reveal a horrific and systematic pattern of abuses targeting women. These include repeated rape in solitary confinement cells, ongoing sexual harassment by guards and interrogators who asked sexually suggestive questions and made comments about detainees' bodies.

Deliberate violations of privacy were also widespread, with women being watched while bathing, bathroom windows opened intentionally to humiliate them, and being mocked and forced to stand in their underwear in courtyards in front of guards. They were compelled to perform forced labor such as cooking and washing clothes, and were filmed after being stripped down to their underwear.

Women were also denied the right to see their children, leading to emotional breakdowns—as was the case with Naza. Those who reported rape were punished by extended detention, such as one young woman from Qamishli. Detainees were forced to appear in staged video recordings and left without medical care even during bleeding episodes—amounting to a systematic regime of sexual and psychological violence.

Shar describes a recurring behavior by interrogators: "An interrogator would come to me and say I was beautiful, ask how I got married, and whether I would accept a proposal from him. I was terrified they were going to rape me again." She adds: "One of the guards harassed me several times when I was detained alone in a room."

The testimonies confirm the occurrence of rape inside detention centers. Shar recounts: "I was raped twice while being held in solitary confinement by one of the prison guards."

Naza (a pseudonym) describes another form of retaliation against women who report sexual violence. Referring to a case she mentioned earlier involving a young woman raped in Hawar Kilis prison, she says: "The girl filed a complaint against her rapist to the prison administration. She has not been released to this day, despite no evidence being presented to suggest she was affiliated with any Kurdish military or administrative groups. Her only 'crime' was filing a complaint against a guard who raped her."

The privacy of female detainees was deliberately violated. Shar recounts: "When they took me to the bathroom, an armed guard kept watching me. When I told him to look away, he slapped me. I asked to return to my cell, and he told me if I did, I would have to drink filth. I was forced to shower in front of him. This continued for three months." She adds: "They monitored us through surveillance cameras inside the detention room."

Further testimonies document how women were forced to be filmed in their underwear and made to sign blank documents. Shar explains: "They forced us to sign blank sheets of paper and record video clips in which we thanked the Turkish state, said we weren't tortured, and that we were treated well. They also took photographs of us and made us strip down to our underwear."

These abuses extended to mothers and pregnant women. Shar describes the conditions in Maarateh prison: "There were twenty women and seven children in our room. The children's ages ranged from 25 days to ten years. In the room next to us, there were twenty-five women and four children, and in another room, twenty women and eleven children."

She continues: "We were given very little food. Mothers and detainees had to buy baby formula at inflated prices—if they even had the money. In many cases, the women simply could not afford it."

Women also endured the severe emotional trauma of being separated from their children. Naza recounts: "I was deprived of seeing my children, who were with their grandmother during my detention. I suffered a nervous breakdown because of it. I had no communication whatsoever with my family or my orphaned children during my entire time in Maarateh prison."

6. Legal Opinion

The documented violations committed by the SNA factions within their controlled area in Afrin are widespread, systematic abuses targeting civilians that may amount to crimes against humanity under

Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which Syria has neither ratified nor is a party to. Since these acts occurred within the context of the armed conflict in Syria, they may also constitute war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute.

The practices documented in this report are in direct contradiction to the core obligation of [Humane Treatment](#) imposed by international humanitarian law, which is a customary binding rule for all parties to the armed conflict. This rule requires respect for the dignity of persons and prohibits cruel or degrading treatment in general. This principle is reflected in most provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Under the principle of Humane Treatment, parties engaged in armed conflict are required to treat civilians and those unable to fight, including detainees, with humanity and dignity. They are prohibited from being subjected to [torture or any form of ill-treatment](#).

[Rape and all forms of sexual violence](#) are also prohibited. Furthermore, under the principle of Humane Treatment, the deprivation of a person's right to due process, such as the right to a [fair trial](#), is forbidden. Additionally, denying certain groups humane treatment based on their religion, ethnicity, beliefs, or any other reason may constitute [unlawful discrimination](#), which violates one of the fundamental pillars of international humanitarian law and international human rights law (Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). It is important to note that international humanitarian law provides special protection for [women](#) and [children](#).

According to customary international humanitarian law, women deprived of their liberty for reasons related to armed conflict should be under the [direct supervision of female personnel](#). [Adequate care and health conditions](#) must be provided for persons deprived of their liberty.

In this regard, Article 89 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies in cases of international armed conflict, including military occupation, mandates the provision of additional food for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under the age of fifteen, in proportion to their physiological needs.

Additionally, Article 76 of Additional Protocol I, which applies in cases of international armed conflict, stipulates the highest priority in treatment for pregnant women and mothers who give birth during detention.

Although Turkey is not a party to this protocol, this provision can be considered a natural extension of the articles concerning humane treatment and the special protection afforded to women and children, which are regarded as customary international law.

According to Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, persons in occupied territories [must not be forcibly transferred individually or in groups](#), nor should they be deported from the occupied territories to the occupying state's territory or to any other country, whether occupied or not, regardless of the reasons for such actions. The Convention also requires detainees to be [allowed](#) to send and receive letters and postcards, in line with the prohibition of [enforced disappearance](#).

Finally, international humanitarian law prohibits [pillage](#), defined as the seizure of private property for personal or private use, and not for military necessity. The parties to the conflict are also obliged to respect the [property rights of displaced persons](#).

As the report establishes a hierarchical structure and cooperation among those running the prisons within an integrated system, responsibility lies with those responsible for the violations. This extends to military

and political leaders, including the leadership of the SNA, from the Minister of Defense to faction leaders, in accordance with Article 2 of the State Responsibility for Internationally Unlawful Acts.

On the other hand, since the Turkish state effectively controls this area, manages its affairs, pays the salaries of the military, and appoints both civilian and military officials, under international law, it is considered an actual occupying power and, therefore, responsible for the violations that occur in this region. This is especially true given the report's documentation of Turkish elements' involvement in these violations, including the transfer of detainees into Turkish territory. Thus, the responsibility for the violations outlined in this report lies with the Turkish state, making it necessary to hold the individuals and officials accountable for these violations.

7. Recommendations

To the new Syrian government:

- 1- Establish an independent national investigation commission to investigate the violations documented in this report, granting it broad powers to access all detention centers and prisons in areas recovered from the control of armed factions.
- 2- Facilitate the work of international committees across all areas of Syria, and cooperate with international mechanisms to facilitate the monitoring and investigation of international crimes committed in Syria, regardless of the perpetrating party.
- 3- Create an official inquiry office to receive and transmit information related to individuals who have been subjected to any form of deprivation of liberty. The relevant authorities should promptly provide this office with information regarding any changes related to these individuals, such as transfers, releases, escapes, hospital admissions, births, and deaths.
- 4- Establish a national fund to compensate victims of violations within one year, with clear mechanisms for both material and moral reparations, and the recovery of looted property.
- 5- Develop a specific timeline for the return of displaced persons to their homes in Afrin and other areas, ensuring their protection from revenge or re-targeting.

To the international, neutral, and independent mechanism for Syria:

1. Investigate the documented violations in our report, collect, preserve, and analyze evidence, with an emphasis on cases of systematic torture and enforced disappearance.
2. Cooperate with relevant authorities, including judicial bodies, to open files on these issues in order to hold military and political leadership accountable.
3. Activate strategic partnerships with Syrian civil society organizations specializing in documenting violations within 6 months, to expand the evidence base and improve future accountability prospects.

To the independent international commission of inquiry on Syria:

1. Conduct an urgent investigation within 60 days into the detention centers still operational in areas controlled by factions supported by Turkey, focusing on secret and private detention centers.
2. We call upon the Special Rapporteur on Torture to urgently examine allegations of torture and other violations in areas controlled by the Syrian National Army, working to collect relevant information and communicate with involved parties, including local and international actors, to ensure accountability and prevent recurrence of these violations.

To the international community and the UNSC:

1. The relevant international body concerned with the missing persons in Syria should facilitate the documentation of cases of enforced disappearance in areas controlled by the Syrian National Army.
2. The International, Neutral, and Independent Mechanism should support national courts in EU countries and elsewhere to open judicial investigations under the principle of universal jurisdiction, against those responsible for documented torture crimes.
3. Allocate sufficient resources for rehabilitation programs for survivors of torture, focusing on psychological, social, and economic support.

To the Turkish government:

1. Allow independent international investigative teams to access areas under its control in northern Syria within 90 days to investigate the documented human rights violations.
2. Immediately disclose the fate of detainees who have been transferred to Turkish territory, ensuring they have access to legal representation and healthcare.
3. Establish an effective mechanism within 60 days to ensure that Syrian factions supported by Turkey comply with human rights standards and international humanitarian law.

To human rights and humanitarian organizations:

1. Prioritize documenting violations committed by the Syrian National Army.
2. Develop specialized programs to rehabilitate survivors of torture, taking into account the specific needs of women and children.
3. Provide legal assistance within 12 months to survivors who wish to file legal complaints, whether before national courts or courts with universal jurisdiction.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the testimonies documented in this report present a horrific image of a systematic and integrated network of violations perpetrated by Turkey-supported factions against civilians in their areas of control, particularly in Afrin. These violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and financial extortion, are not isolated incidents but institutional practices that may rise to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The international silence regarding these flagrant violations amounts to indirect complicity and perpetuates a culture of impunity. Therefore, the international community must activate the principle of universal jurisdiction to prosecute those responsible for these crimes and employ all available legal, diplomatic, and economic tools to pressure the responsible parties.

Ultimately, sustainable peace in Syria cannot be achieved without justice and redress for the victims. Transitional justice, accountability, and compensation for victims and their families are not merely moral and legal imperatives; they are also essential conditions for building a future that ensures the prevention of such atrocities and upholds the dignity and rights of all Syrians, regardless of their affiliations.



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