



An in-depth investigation into the systematic patterns of arrest, torture, and sectarian and ethnic cleansing carried out by factions of the “Syrian National Army” in both Afrin and the Syrian coastal region.

Table of Contents:

1. Executive Summary
2. Legal Opinion and Recommendations
3. Investigation Methodology
4. Background: Two Regions, One Mechanism of Repression
5. The Torture Network: From Afrin’s Prisons

6. Sectarian Cleansing as a Unified Strategy: Alawites on the Coast
7. Violations Against Women and Children: A Systematic Pattern Across Both Regions
8. Psychological and Social Impact: Wounds That Transcend Geography

1. Executive Summary:

This in-depth investigation reveals a disturbing reality that goes far beyond isolated violations: a unified and carefully coordinated machinery of repression—resembling a military-style organization—operated by factions of the Syrian National Army across two geographically distant areas that share striking similarities: Afrin, in northern Aleppo, and the Syrian coastal region in Latakia governorate.

In both regions, identical patterns of abuse have emerged: the same slogans, the same methods of torture, the same forms of execution, and often the same perpetrators.

These findings are based on fifteen detailed testimonies from victims and eyewitnesses, documenting how sectarian and ethnic differences have been weaponized as justifications for systematic war crimes. In Afrin, the “Sultan Suleiman Shah” faction (known as al-Amshat) and the “Hamza Division” (al-Hamzat) have been systematically targeting Kurdish civilians since 2018, according to witness accounts included in this report.

Meanwhile, on the Syrian coast, Alawite civilians have been the primary targets since March 2025, under sectarian slogans such as “cleansing Islam of the Alawite pigs.”

One name repeatedly cited in testimonies is Munaf al-Daher, described as moving between Afrin and the coast

with his brother and entourage. One female witness stated, “He knew exactly how to torture without killing—as if he had special training.” The recurring mention of his name and conduct points to his central role as a link between detention centers in the two regions, reinforcing the hypothesis of a coordinated network facilitating the transfer of repressive “expertise” across areas.

The collected evidence suggests these crimes are neither random acts nor immediate reactions but part of a deliberate strategy of sectarian and ethnic cleansing. This strategy is executed by a sophisticated criminal network involving secret prisons, equipped torture facilities, trained fighters and officers operating across regions, and clear military-security coordination.

The repeated phrase in survivor testimonies—“We’ll take you beyond the sun”—used in both geographic contexts, stands as compelling evidence of a unified and consistent system of repression. It supports the hypothesis of centralized directives or shared training within these factions.

2. Legal Opinion and Recommendations

The acts documented in this report constitute grave and multi-layered violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), these [acts rise to the level of war crimes under Article 8](#), particularly with regard to willful killing, torture, inhumane treatment, and outrages upon personal dignity. They also amount to [crimes against humanity under Article 7](#) due to their widespread and systematic nature directed against civilian populations.

The sectarian and ethnic nature of the targeting—evident in testimonies describing the killing of victims based on their religious or ethnic identity—may further elevate these crimes to the level of [genocide under Article 6 of the Rome Statute](#). This is especially clear in light of the "specific intent" to destroy, in whole or in part, religious and ethnic groups. The use of rape and sexual violence as tools of war constitutes an [independent war crime](#), a fact well-established in the [jurisprudence of international tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda](#). The human rights violations documented in this report may constitute the following international crimes under international law:

War Crimes

The acts described in this report occurred in the context of a protracted non-international armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, following the collapse of the Assad regime on December 8. Based on available evidence and applicable legal standards, these actions may constitute war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute.

Specific war crimes potentially committed include:

- War crime of willful killing (Article 8)
- War crime of torture or inhuman treatment (Article 8(2)(c)(i))
- War crime of outrages upon personal dignity, including humiliating and degrading treatment (Article 8(2)(c)(ii))
- War crime of rape, sexual slavery, or other forms of sexual violence constituting serious breaches of the Geneva Conventions (Article 8(2)(e)(vi))

Evidence indicates that these crimes were committed against persons not taking part in hostilities and in

circumstances that demonstrate the requisite connection to the armed conflict.

Crimes Against Humanity

The actions described by victims reveal a consistent and repetitive pattern of conduct across multiple geographic locations over an extended period. The recurrence of these acts, directed against civilian populations, suggests they may be part of a widespread and systematic attack as required under Article 7 of the Rome Statute.

The deliberate targeting of civilians appears to be discriminatory in nature, specifically aimed at certain ethnic and religious groups. These behavioral patterns, along with the apparent organized policy behind the attacks, may fulfill the contextual elements of crimes against humanity.

Accordingly, the abuses suffered by the victims may constitute the following crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute:

Available evidence suggests that these acts were carried out as part of an organizational policy, and that the perpetrators were aware of the broader context of the attacks on civilian populations—thus meeting the required mental element (*mens rea*) for crimes against humanity.

It is important to note that persecution in this context appears to have been conducted through gendered and intersectional means. Women and girls, particularly from persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, were deliberately subjected to sexual violence, slavery, and other forms of gender-based oppression. These actions not only constitute individual violations, but are also used as tools of societal destruction—aimed at undermining social cohesion, weakening communities, and fracturing the identity of persecuted groups.

The intersection between ethnic, sectarian, and gender-based targeting reflects a system of intersectional oppression that intensifies the inflicted harm and underscores the deliberate use of sexual and gender-based violence as part of a broader strategy of ethnic cleansing and social domination.

Genocide

Under international criminal law, genocide is defined as the commission of prohibited acts with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such—pursuant to Article 6 of the Rome Statute and the 1948 Genocide Convention.

Based on the testimonies and factual accounts presented in this report, it can be inferred that some of the documented acts reflect an intent to destroy, at least partially, specific religious and ethnic groups within the Syrian Arab Republic. These acts may include:

- **Killing members of the group** (Article 6(a)): Numerous accounts describe deliberate and systematic killings of individuals targeted solely because of their religious or ethnic identity. These killings appear to be part of a coordinated policy aimed at eliminating significant portions of the targeted population. When such acts are committed with genocidal intent against members of protected groups, they may meet the legal threshold for genocide under Article 6(a).
- **Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group** (Article 6(b)): International jurisprudence from the ICTY and ICTR has recognized that acts such as torture, inhumane or degrading treatment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence can constitute serious bodily or mental harm.

The evidence suggests that such acts were employed systematically—not only to harm individuals, but also to destabilize, stigmatize, and dismantle targeted communities.

- **Deliberately inflicting living conditions intended to destroy the group in whole or in part** (Article 6(c)):

The systematic use of sexual violence, particularly against women and girls, may indicate genocidal intent. Sexual violence has been recognized as a tool of genocide, targeting both individuals and the collective identity of a group—undermining its cohesion and capacity for continuity. In this context, the deliberate targeting of women and girls, along with actions designed to cause profound trauma and stigma within the community, may amount to efforts aimed at destroying the group.

Furthermore, the pattern of conduct includes acts targeting women and girls in ways that may signal genocidal intent, acknowledging the specific impact of gender-based violence on the survival and well-being of affected communities. The resulting social stigma, intergenerational trauma, and community destabilization caused by these violations may form part of a broader strategy to destroy the group.

Recommendations

To the International Community:

- Impose comprehensive, targeted sanctions on senior and mid-level leaders of the involved factions, including asset freezes and travel bans, and extend these sanctions to cover their support networks and financial backers.
- Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC). If continued obstruction at the

UN Security Council persists, invoke the [Uniting for Peace mechanism through the UN General Assembly](#).

To the Turkish Government:

- Immediately and fully halt all military, logistical, and financial support to factions found responsible for these violations.
- Conduct a transparent and independent investigation into the involvement of Turkish officials in overseeing the detention network in Afrin, and hold those responsible accountable under both Turkish and international law.
- Surrender internationally wanted faction leaders residing on Turkish soil to international justice.
- Grant international human rights organizations and UN investigators access to areas under the control of these factions to document ongoing violations.

To International and Regional Organizations:

- Activate the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle, in light of the Syrian state's failure to protect its citizens from these mass atrocities.
- Provide comprehensive protection and support—psychological, medical, and legal—to survivors and witnesses, while ensuring their full right to compensation and reparations.
- Ensure that victims and their families are compensated from frozen faction assets and international aid funds.

3. Investigation Methodology

This investigation was conducted using a rigorous methodology that combined direct field documentation with specialized legal analysis. Data collection included ten

detailed testimonies from direct victims, eyewitnesses, and relatives of victims, gathered over the course of May to June 2025. The sources were geographically diverse, covering Afrin and its surrounding areas, villages along the Syrian coast in Latakia governorate, and parts of rural Hama. This geographic spread allows for a comprehensive understanding of the violations across different regions.

This report is part of a broader initiative by Lelun Association for Victims, aimed at documenting systematic abuses in various regions of Syria. The association previously contributed critical testimonies to CNN's March 2025 investigation into the "Pine Massacre" on the Syrian coast, which uncovered the killing of more than 200 individuals in sectarian attacks. This new report deepens the understanding of the broader picture by showing that the coastal events were not isolated incidents, but rather part of a coordinated criminal strategy executed by the same factions and actors across geographically distant yet organizationally linked areas.

The report aligns with a wider wave of international documentation efforts focused on systematic abuses in Syria. Its findings intersect with recent reports from UN bodies and international human rights organizations. Notably, [Human Rights Watch's 2025 report](#) confirmed that factions from the Syrian National Army and the Military Police continue to subject dozens of individuals to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, mistreatment, and sexual violence.

High standards of safety and confidentiality were maintained throughout the investigation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were made aware of the nature of the investigation, its potential uses, and associated risks. Pseudonyms were used for all witnesses and victims, and identifying details and precise

locations were withheld. Original data was securely stored using strict protocols to protect sensitive information.

All testimonies were reviewed and verified by experienced human rights investigators, with special attention to chronological accuracy and consistency with known patterns of abuse in the region. Cross-referencing between testimonies helped identify common patterns and links between violations in different areas, revealing the coordinated and systematic nature of the crimes.

4. Background: Two Regions, One Mechanism of Repression

Recent international reports reinforce the systematic nature of the violations documented in this investigation. In January 2025, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria published a report titled "Web of Agony: UN Commission's report unveils depths of former government's detention crimes during first decade of Syrian war," based on over 2,000 testimonies. Meanwhile, the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented approximately 2,623 cases of arbitrary arrest in 2024 alone, attributed to various armed factions.

From the moment the Syrian National Army (SNA) factions took control of Afrin in March 2018, signs of an [organized pattern of criminal behavior](#) began to emerge. This was not confined to a single region, but rather represented a prototype for a replicable and transferable apparatus of repression. Over the span of seven years, this pattern evolved in Afrin—sharpening its methods and expanding its reach—and was later exported in full force to the Syrian coast by March 2025. This transfer of tactics exposed a long-term strategy of sectarian and ethnic cleansing that transcends local geography.

A deep analysis of collected testimonies from both Afrin and the coastal region reveals a striking uniformity in techniques and tactics. This resemblance goes beyond random similarity, reaching near-total alignment in even the smallest operational details. These include identical arrest and transfer methods, torture rituals, slogans used during interrogations, and even specific phrases repeated by interrogators to break victims' will. Most alarmingly, many of the same commanding figures were identified as responsible across both regions—strong evidence of an organized criminal network transferring expertise and personnel between areas.

In Afrin, the campaign began with the systematic targeting of Kurds under the pretext of "counterterrorism." In practice, it quickly evolved into explicit ethnic and sectarian targeting of unarmed civilians, including women, children, and the elderly. Over time, complex networks of secret prisons and torture centers were established, and personnel were trained in advanced methods of repression and humiliation.

This expertise, honed in Afrin, was later deployed wholesale in the Syrian coastal region, where the same methods were applied against Alawite communities. The rhetoric and slogans were adapted to reflect sectarian differences, but the core strategy of repression remained unchanged.

5. The Torture Network: From Afrin's Prisons

For more than two years, Dilan was forcibly transferred between various detention centers, her will was broken through coerced filming and forced suicide attempts. In a harrowing testimony exposing the horrifying depths of a coordinated torture network, Dilan (a pseudonym), a young woman abducted by the Hamza Division in Afrin in 2018, recounts her ordeal: over two years of systematic abuse that included torture, sexual harassment, forced

recordings, and psychological torment within the prison system run by the Hamza Division.

She begins by describing the moment that changed her life forever:

"In late September 2018, I was kidnapped by a group affiliated with the Hamza Division in Afrin. They took me to a private house, where I was subjected to severe torture and repeated harassment over three days. After that, I was transferred to what is known as 'the Refrigerators Prison,' affiliated with Turkish intelligence. I remained there for four months—some of the most brutal of my life. I was beaten so severely I suffered a concussion, starved for extended periods, and held in solitary confinement. I was only allowed to use the bathroom once every two days."

Dilan's testimony reveals a calculated strategy designed to break victims physically and psychologically, combining physical torture with sexual humiliation and deprivation of basic needs. She adds chilling details about how forced filming was used as a tool of psychological torture:

"One day, the guards filmed me in my underwear under the pretense that I would be released. I felt humiliated and hopeless and tried to take my own life—but I failed. Instead of stopping, they beat me savagely. Later, I was transferred to Ma'arrata Prison, where I remained for a year. During that time, I was starved, contracted lice and scabies, and my health deteriorated drastically."

When Children Become Targets

Benafsh (a pseudonym) was just a child when armed men stormed her house in the middle of the night. Her young age offered no protection from a machine of repression that made no distinction between old and young. In a deeply disturbing account that underscores the systematic targeting of minors, Benafsh, a Kurdish girl from Afrin,

recalls being detained in June 2018 while still underage. She would spend years in the prisons of armed factions, enduring torture, racial slurs, forced confessions, and near-nude filming.

"In June 2018, around 2 a.m., I was arrested by an armed group affiliated with a faction of the Syrian National Army. They raided our home, tied my hands, blindfolded me, wrapped me in a blanket, beat and kicked me, and threw me into a vehicle. At the time, I was still a minor. I was first taken to what's known as 'the Refrigerators Prison,' where I was held for three days without food or water, in utterly inhumane conditions."

Benafsh reveals the systematic methods used to break her and extract false confessions—tactics that combined physical torture with psychological and racial abuse:

"I was then transferred to the 'Hawar Kilis Prison' for investigation. There, they accused me of participating in protests or political meetings while I was still in middle school. I denied the allegations, and in response, I was severely beaten and subjected to racial and sectarian slurs—things like 'party pig' and 'whore'—as well as deeply offensive anti-Kurdish insults. I was then placed in solitary confinement for eight months under the pretext of an ongoing investigation."

She also reveals how victims were exploited to produce fabricated propaganda content meant to justify these violations in the public eye:

"Later, I was forced to sign and read a statement on camera that included false confessions, claiming I had worked for the Kurdish Autonomous Administration's intelligence services in Afrin for three years and continued working with them after the armed factions took over the city. I refused to say it, so they beat me badly and electrocuted me.

Afterward, I was sent back to the 'Refrigerators Prison,' where they told me they would release me only after filming me nearly naked."

The Shadow Across Regions: Munaf al-Daher

One name echoed across testimonies from both Afrin and the Syrian coast: Munaf al-Daher—a key figure linking torture networks across hundreds of kilometers. His name stands out as a critical indicator of the interconnectedness between detention centers and the pivotal role he played in transferring repressive techniques between regions. Dilan sheds light on his central role in the prison network and his frequent movement across regions:

"Later, I was transferred to a prison in Azaz, where I stayed for fifteen days. The prison was supervised by someone named Munaf al-Daher. I was repeatedly beaten and had nothing to wear but filthy, tattered clothing. I later learned that Munaf traveled between Afrin and the Syrian coast. Eventually, I was sent back to Ma'arrata Prison, where the same pattern repeated—verbal harassment and starvation."

Benafsh also confirms Munaf al-Daher's involvement and shares critical details about his rank within the Hamza Division:

"One of the guards was named Munaf al-Daher. He was the personal bodyguard of Saif Abu Bakr. Al-Daher insulted us daily, using racist and religious slurs. We were subjected to another round of interrogations where we were accused of having connections with Kurdish political and military groups—which they said was enough reason to arrest us. Later, we were transferred to the 'Agricultural Prison' in al-Bab, where al-Daher told us, 'You'll rot in these prisons.'"



A private photo of Munaf al-Daher taken in the Syrian coastal region accompanies the testimonies, further substantiating his presence and operational role in both areas.

When a Minor Dispute Became a Massacre

A simple disagreement between children spiraled into a pretext for the arrest of thirty people—ending with one of them tortured to death, his ribcage crushed and a bone piercing his lung. In testimony that reads like it was drawn from the darkest pages of human history, Mahmoud (a pseudonym), an eyewitness from rural Afrin, recounts a mass arrest carried out by the Sultan Suleiman Shah Division. The victims—thirty residents of his village—were targeted over a minor quarrel between children. He describes how his peaceful village was transformed into a scene of organized atrocities, revealing the systematic and premeditated nature of the violence practiced by these factions:

“After the incident, several parents of displaced children filed a complaint against a local man who worked for a humanitarian aid organization. Following this, the leader of

the Sultan Suleiman Shah Division, known as Mohammad al-Jassem, or 'Abu Amsha,' issued an order to arrest the man—along with everyone in the village who shared his last name, regardless of age or gender.”

Mahmoud describes the brutal and systematic torture methods used against the detainees—techniques that suggest specialized training in humiliation and physical abuse:

“The faction’s fighters arrested around thirty people and took them to one of their military compounds, where they were subjected to severe beatings and humiliation during both transport and detention. Women were tortured using methods such as *falaqa* (beating the soles of the feet), while young men were beaten while tied inside tires—a method known as ‘the wheel’—and insulted with sectarian and degrading slurs like ‘infidels’ and ‘pigs.’”

In a moment of indescribable cruelty, Mahmoud recounts the death of one of the detainees, exposing the lethal nature of the faction’s methods and the apparent intent behind them:

“The victim, A.A., was brutally beaten by about five members of the group. He suffered severe fractures in his pelvis and ribcage, one of which pierced his lung. He died while in detention as a result.”

In late 2018, Feydan (a pseudonym) recounts how one of her female relatives was detained with her two sons by the Hamza Division. The woman spent more than two years moving between prisons, during which she was subjected to torture, harassment, and threats to kill her family. Feydan explains how the phrase “We’ll take you beyond the sun” was used as a psychological weapon—one that became a chilling symbol of the terror these groups instill in their victims:

"She was directly threatened with the murder of her husband and children. They told her things like, 'We'll take you beyond the sun.' After fifteen days in detention, she was transferred to the 'Refrigerators Prison,' where she faced severe conditions—starvation, constant verbal harassment—even though she was nearly fifty years old."

In a far more brutal use of the same phrase, Feydan adds further details, shedding light on the sadistic mindset of her relative's captors:

"She was later moved to a detention farm run by the Hamza Division, where she was completely cut off from her husband and children. They told her that her family had been 'sent beyond the sun.' During the transfer, she was again subjected to intense verbal harassment and racist, sectarian slurs, including: 'You are pigs,' 'The party is trafficking you,' and, 'We've arrested many Kurds carrying contraceptive pills.'"

6. Sectarian Cleansing as a Unified Strategy: Alawites on the Coast

Tawfiq (a pseudonym), a man in his fifties from the coastal city of Jableh, recounts his eyewitness account of the March 2025 massacre targeting the Alawite community, which claimed over 500 lives—half of whom were women and children. He describes how his once-tranquil neighborhood became the site of one of the most horrific atrocities in recent memory. Tawfiq begins with a precise account of the initial attack, underscoring the operation's premeditated and organized nature:

"At exactly 1:00 p.m. on March 7, 2025, armed groups entered the al-Qusour neighborhood of Jableh in mud-covered Santa Fe vehicles. They began killing residents based on their religious identity. Alawite residents were specifically targeted—asked about their sect and killed

immediately upon answering. Others who weren't as extreme looted homes and properties."

In a chilling scene that reflects the massacre's human cost and its scale, Tawfiq offers a horrific continuation:

"Neighbors reported continuous gunfire. The killings continued until the following day. More factions arrived and went to upper floors, executing anyone left alive. Corpses lay exposed in homes. The Syrian Red Crescent later intervened to collect the bodies and bury them in organized mass graves in Sheikh Hilal Cemetery."



Exclusive Images of Sheikh Hilal Cemetery

Tawfiq concludes with a shocking statistic that illustrates the full scale of the tragedy:

"The number of victims exceeded 500—about 50% were women and children. Most were highly educated."

He also describes the broader pattern of violations accompanying the massacre, revealing a systematic campaign of terror:

"There were cases of torture, looting of shops and homes, and assaults on elderly men and women—including the beheading of a young girl. Patients and the wounded were threatened to prevent them from receiving treatment. In the villages of rural Baniyas, Jableh, al-Asaliya, al-Ain al-Sharqiya, al-Ramliyah, and Sanoubar, Alawite residents were deliberately targeted. Mass executions, kidnappings,

and killings continued, and families who remained were forced to flee their homes.”

These testimonies corroborate the findings of a May 2025 Human Rights Watch report titled “[Everything is by the Power of Weapon: Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria](#).” The report documented cases of abduction, arbitrary detention, unlawful imprisonment, sexual violence, and torture committed by various factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army in areas under their control during recent years of the conflict in northern Syria.

A Unified Slogan of Death: “Cleansing Islam of Alawite Pigs”

In a trembling voice laden with sorrow and disbelief, Walid (a pseudonym), a 23-year-old university student from the village of Rassafeh in Hama, recounts his survival of a massacre that claimed the lives of 63 villagers, including children. He witnessed his cousins executed before his eyes before fleeing into the mountains. He begins by describing the ominous preparations that preceded the massacre—evidence of calculated, premeditated planning:

“On Thursday, March 6, 2025, armed factions entered our village and imposed a curfew from 9:00 p.m. until 7:30 a.m. the next morning, Friday. They set up checkpoints at both ends of the village. The curfew was declared without any security incident or threat to justify it. Their entry clearly carried a sectarian motive.”

Walid offers a detailed description of the assailants, highlighting their diverse origins and shared purpose:

“Four factions arrived at our home. The first group had about 18 men dressed in olive-green uniforms and black masks. Their headbands read ‘There is no god but Allah’. They were clean-shaven, some in camouflage, others in

desert attire or black clothing with scarves. Their backgrounds varied—Idlib, Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Turkestan. They stormed into the house, smashing glass and anything they could destroy. They demanded to know where the weapons and men were, even though we had surrendered all weapons after the fall of the regime. We had nothing.”

He reveals the shocking sectarian ideology driving the massacre—delivered with deliberate messaging intended to justify mass violence:

“They told us they came ‘to cleanse Islam of Alawite pigs.’ They used degrading language, yelling at the men, ‘Come out, you pig!’ They spray-painted slogans on stores such as ‘Forces to Repel the Aggression’ and ‘Heroes of the Sunnah,’ clearly indicating that ‘the aggression’ they meant was our own Alawite community.”

Walid further details the highly coordinated nature of the attack:

“The factions entered the village from the east with about 82 pickup trucks—white, olive, and black—as well as large transport vans typically used for civilian workers. The vehicles bore license plates from Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo. There were no Turkish vehicles or national flags, only black and white banners inscribed with ‘There is no god but Allah.’ The group was led by a cleric known as Abu Abdullah, dressed in Pakistani-style clothes. The emir, Abu Salma, remained in a designated spot where he summoned young men to issue fatwas—religious rulings—for execution or beheading.”

In a devastating conclusion, Walid recounts the human toll of the attack:

“I saw my cousins killed in front of me, which forced me to flee and hide in the mountains. As for the women in our

family and the village, we were all displaced. Our home was completely looted and destroyed. The women were robbed of their gold and money. The factions tried to bring a bus to transport the women to Idlib. There were no rapes, but they asked for the girls' ages with threatening looks and implied intentions. The total number of martyrs in the village reached around 63, including four children and their mother, aged between 3 and 10. The children were killed because the orders were to eliminate everyone—old and young alike."

When a Woman's Life Became a Living Nightmare

Layla (a pseudonym), a 39-year-old widow from Latakia, lost her husband and three male relatives in a massacre carried out by armed factions in March 2025. She witnessed the raid and mass arrest that ended in execution. She begins her harrowing account of the night her life was torn apart, transitioning from a content wife and mother to a bereaved woman who lost all the men in her family in a single night:

"Around 11:00 p.m., we began hearing gunfire in the distance. The sound grew louder. In our home was my mother-in-law's son—my brother-in-law, a doctor who wasn't living with us but had a clinic and a house in the village. He was about 40 and specialized in gastrointestinal diseases. Despite our fear, we continued our evening as usual. I prepared a place for my husband, children, and myself to sleep in the hallway, away from stray bullets, since our house overlooked the main road."

Layla offers a vivid description of the terrifying night she will never forget:

"That night, our house was struck by multiple bullets. By morning, we found it riddled with holes. The windows were completely shattered. A shell had hit the hallway pillar

where we were sleeping—but thankfully, no one was hurt. We tried moving to the kitchen, thinking it would be safer, but gunfire came from that direction too, so we returned to the hallway. Eventually, we went downstairs to my mother-in-law’s home and placed the children in a central room away from the windows.”

Then came the moment that changed her life forever—she describes the attackers’ brutality and contempt for civilian lives:

“Suddenly, an armed group began banging on the door violently during a house-to-house sweep. The women and children were all in one room, while the men opened the door. The attackers took the men outside. My uncle-in-law began shouting ‘Ya Allah! Ya Allah!’ One of them mockingly replied, ‘You know God?’ They took my husband, the doctor, and my uncle. They were masked—we couldn’t see their faces. We, the women and children, remained inside. Then two men entered—both dressed in black. One was masked, clean-shaven; the other was unmasked with a long beard.”

In a crushing revelation of the men’s fate—and the cruel deception inflicted upon the family—Layla concludes:

“Days later, we learned that the men had been taken to a site near our home and executed by gunshots to the head. We had no idea they had been killed. We believed they would return—that we were civilians, uninvolved in any political or military activity, and that this was just an interrogation. We made endless calls trying to find them, but in vain. We contacted my husband’s uncle’s family, who told us that more of their men had been taken too. In total, seven family members were executed—four from our household, and three from my husband’s cousins.”

7. Violations Against Women and Children: A Systematic Pattern Across Both Regions

Fidan's testimony reveals the disturbing details of systematic harassment and sexual humiliation faced by detained women—blatant violations of the most basic principles of human dignity. She describes how detention alongside her female relative turned into a theater of degradation:

"Members of the Hamza Division deliberately humiliated her, questioning her in degrading ways about her marital life, using vulgar and inhumane language such as: 'How do you sleep with your husband? What do you wear for him?' She was also photographed in her underwear, a blatant violation of her dignity. After four months, she was transferred back to an Asayish prison."

Nisreen (pseudonym), a woman arrested from her home in Afrin in May 2018 without any legal warrant, spent over two and a half years in the prisons of the Hamza Division (known as "al-Hamzat"). She recounts being beaten to the point that her teeth fell out, being photographed naked, and subjected to deliberate starvation. Her harrowing journey through this network of abuse illustrates how these factions employ gender-specific methods to break women's spirits and destroy their dignity:

"In May 2018, at 5 a.m., fighters affiliated with al-Hamzat raided my home without any legal order. They violently dragged me out in front of my family and transferred me to solitary confinement in the Hawar Kilis detention center. From the moment of arrest, I was subjected to humiliation and degradation."

Nisreen adds further details that expose the systematic nature of the abuse:

"The faction's members hurled degrading insults at me, calling me 'the scum of society' and referring to women from our area as immoral and faithless. During interrogations, I was severely beaten, which caused my teeth to fall out. I sustained bruises and injuries across my body. After a year and a half in detention, just before being moved to al-Bab prison, some of the guards at Hawar Kilis photographed me naked under the pretext that I would be released."

Describing the inhumane prison conditions, Nisreen continues:

"In al-Bab prison, conditions were extremely harsh. I was deliberately starved and denied access to hygiene for long periods, which led to lice infestations and scabies. During food distribution, the guards would hit and kick us, calling us 'animals.' I was later transferred to a small farm in the village of Maarata, turned into a makeshift prison infested with rats and insects. All detainees suffered from skin and respiratory diseases with no medical care whatsoever."

The [UN Commission of Inquiry confirmed in its March 2024 report](#) that Syrian National Army factions continued to arbitrarily detain civilians and subject some to torture and ill-treatment in various detention facilities.

Hevin (pseudonym), a 25-year-old woman, shares the story of her fellow detainee Salwa Youssef (also a pseudonym), a former nurse from Afrin who endured years of torture and forced filming in detention. Her account highlights how professional women in essential sectors have been systematically targeted:

"Salwa Youssef, a resident of Afrin, used to work as a nurse before the Syrian National Army factions took control of the area. After their arrival, her house was raided several times

by armed members, forcing her to hide among relatives out of fear of arrest.”

Hevin recounts the systematic torture she witnessed in prison:

“In April 2018, at around 3 a.m., members of the military police raided a home where she was hiding and arrested her. She was first taken to a house known as ‘al-Housh al-Arabi’ in Afrin, where she was beaten and physically harassed under the supervision of a man called Abu al-Laith. After three days, she was transferred to Hawar Kilis prison, where she remained for nine months. During that time, she endured severe torture and verbal harassment by guards—including Manaf al-Daher, a known aide to Sayf Abu Bakr, then-leader of the Hamza Division, who oversaw the prison.”

Hevin adds chilling details about the use of fabricated confessions and coercive filming as tools of psychological torture and propaganda:

“Salwa was forced to confess on camera to false charges, including that she provided medical support to Kurdish fighters on the front lines. Days later, she was filmed again—this time in her underwear—under the pretense of ‘proving’ that there were no signs of torture on her body. She was then transferred to a former Asayish prison, where she spent a year suffering from psychological torture, starvation, poor hygiene, lack of medical care, and continuous verbal harassment.”

Hevin concludes with a detailed outline of Salwa’s trajectory through a sprawling prison network:

“After four months, she was transferred to a house in the village of Maarata in the Afrin area, where she remained for another year. She was later returned to the former Asayish prison in the Mahmoudiyah neighborhood, then transferred

to the Azaz prison under the command of Sayf Abu Bakr. There, she spent 15 days under psychological torture and was coerced into giving false statements. She was then moved to the military police prison in al-Bab, where she remained for a month under the pretext of 'routine investigation,' before being sent back to Maarata prison. There, she endured intense verbal harassment, including slurs such as 'You are party whores,' 'You are pigs and dogs of the party.'"

8. Psychological and Social Impact: Wounds That Transcend Geography

Sawsan (pseudonym), the wife of a former detainee from rural Afrin, offers a moving testimony revealing how the consequences of torture extend beyond the direct victim, consuming entire families and turning ordinary life into a permanent nightmare. She begins by explaining the financial desperation that led to her husband's arrest:

"In mid-November 2023, my husband decided to return to our village despite knowing the risks. But poverty and the lack of any future in Aleppo pushed him to take the chance. Just three days after his return, five armed men from the Sultan Suleiman Shah faction, known as 'al-Amshat,' raided our home. They took him without a warrant or any formal explanation, saying it was 'just a routine investigation.'"

Sawsan sheds light on the economic dimension of the crimes—how arbitrary detention is weaponized for extortion and profit:

"From that day on, our lives were turned upside down. Days later, I learned that he was being brutally tortured at the faction's headquarters—his back and right hand were broken from beatings. Intermediaries told us that the faction was demanding \$1,000 for his release and to 'settle his status.' We didn't have that kind of money—we could

barely afford food. After seven months of suffering and waiting, we managed to gather \$600, but they still didn't release him. Instead, they transferred him to al-Rai prison on fabricated charges of collaborating with the Autonomous Administration."

In a devastating account of her husband's psychological and physical collapse, Sawsan Adds:

"He remained in al-Rai prison for three and a half months under inhumane conditions, and was finally released in late September 2024. But he came out a completely different person—barely speaking, suffering from chronic insomnia, panic attacks, persistent chills, and uncontrollable episodes of crying for no reason. He cannot sleep at night and lives in constant fear that someone will attack us at any moment. He's terrified of everything. Today, my husband is completely unable to work; he cannot handle any physical effort due to his injuries, and his mental condition prevents him from interacting with others. He is on continuous psychiatric medication prescribed by a specialist at a medical center we barely managed to access—though the treatment costs far exceed our financial capacity."

Tawfiq offers a deeper analysis of the social collapse affecting entire communities:

"A large number of Alawite public employees were arbitrarily dismissed from government institutions. Widespread poverty and dependency on aid have spread through communities that were once known for peaceful coexistence. These are not isolated incidents—they are systematic acts of sectarian ethnic cleansing carried out by armed factions, some of them with the approval or silent complicity of the current government. Investigations and accountability remain absent, deepening the suffering of these communities."

In a powerful call for justice and accountability, reflecting the deep awareness among victims that only justice can break the cycle of violence and prevent its recurrence, Tawfiq concludes:

"I speak with full responsibility and according to my conscience when I say these grave violations have been documented carefully and based on direct eyewitness accounts. I call on the international community and human rights bodies to initiate urgent investigations and hold those responsible accountable, to lift the injustice suffered by the victims."

Conclusion: A Machine of Repression That Recognizes No Borders

This in-depth investigation reveals a horrifying truth that goes beyond a series of isolated abuses: we are facing a unified and meticulously engineered machinery of repression. This apparatus is operated by factions of the "Syrian National Army," functioning as a coordinated criminal network active across geographically dispersed areas but bound by a single methodology and empowered by sustained impunity.

This machinery pays no heed to geographic borders or sectarian differences. Rather, it adapts to local contexts while remaining true to its criminal core. From Afrin to Syria's coastal regions, the same patterns repeat: the same slogans, the same torture methods, the same figures, and even the same terrifying phrases—most notoriously: "We'll take you beyond the sun." It's as if they are following a single operations manual, systematically disseminated and drilled into their operatives.

The uniformity in detail, the repetition of arrest and torture techniques, and the consistent sectarian and ethnic persecution are not coincidences. They are the result of a

deliberate and well-planned strategy, transported from one region to another along with trained personnel and acquired expertise—clear evidence of central coordination and ongoing logistical support.

Yet, the significance of this investigation does not stop at documentation. It goes further to expose that the international community is not dealing with isolated local abuses, but with an evolving form of transregional criminality—capable of adapting and expanding so long as it remains shielded from accountability. The international silence over what happened in Afrin was not merely a neglect of Kurdish suffering, but an implicit green light for similar atrocities to be repeated—this time in Syria’s coastal regions.

It is time to break this deadly cycle of impunity. The evidence presented in this investigation does more than describe crimes—it offers a legal roadmap for international justice mechanisms. It names perpetrators, identifies repeated patterns, and presents compelling, corroborated testimonies that can be used for prosecution.

More importantly, this report issues an urgent call for prevention. Silence on these crimes allows the criminal model to spread into new areas and communities. Every day without investigation or accountability is another opportunity granted to perpetrators to expand and evolve.

What is needed now is not symbolic condemnation or toothless fact-finding missions, but urgent international action to dismantle this network, prosecute its leaders, and deliver justice to its victims.

This necessity has been echoed by the international community itself. As Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the UN Commission of Inquiry, [stated](#) in January 2025:

“We stand at a critical juncture. The caretaker government and future Syrian authorities can now ensure these crimes are never repeated.”

The voices of victims and survivors documented in this investigation do not seek pity or sympathy. They demand justice and dignity. These voices are a final outcry—before eternal silence falls over more witnesses, and before this machine of repression spreads to other communities that have yet to taste the agony experienced by the people of Afrin and Syria’s coast.



► **About LELUN:**

We are a group of daughters and sons of Afrin, who love its soil, are devoted to its olives, and we believe in the history of the fathers and grandfathers, and in fulfillment of their efforts and struggle in preserving the human being, the land and the trees, and in order for the trees to return to their splendor, and for the families and loved ones to return to their mountains, plains and homes, it was necessary to launch The ground is being prepared for the return of rights to their owners and the pursuit of justice.

The goal of justice for the victims was the main stimulus that generated us; Young men and women of Afrin who are jealous of its people, people and land, regardless of their nationality, sect, background or political affiliation, to establish an association for the victims of violations in this Afrin under the name "Lilon", to extend a helping hand to the affected women on an equal footing, by defending them.

"Lilon" will work to contribute to the prosecution efforts by providing evidence related to the violations committed against the residents and people of the Afrin region by all parties to the conflict, and to contribute to compensating the affected victims.

