



Lelun Association for Victims: Statement on the Eighth Anniversary of “Operation Olive Branch”



Today marks the eighth anniversary of “Operation Olive Branch,” launched on January 20, 2018. The operation concluded on March 18, 2018, with Turkish-backed Syrian National Army factions taking control of the Syrian region of Afrin. This was accompanied by serious violations affecting civilians, their property, and their fundamental rights.

The operation marked a tragic turning point in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Afrin’s original inhabitants. It triggered large-scale forced displacement that has continued over the intervening years and persists to this day. Many remain displaced in harsh conditions across northern and northeastern Syria, deprived of their right to return to their homes in a safe, voluntary, and dignified manner.

Since then, numerous human rights organizations, including the Lelun Association for Victims, have documented widespread and systematic patterns of violations, including:

- Forced displacement
- Unlawful seizure of private property
- Extortion
- Abduction and arbitrary detention
- Enforced disappearance
- Violations affecting human dignity and the cultural identity of the indigenous population
- Extrajudicial killings

Despite ongoing references to plans for the return of forcibly displaced persons, conditions on the ground continue to fall short of the minimum legal and security guarantees required for safe and sustainable return. Many returnees have encountered significant obstacles in reclaiming their property, while others have been subjected to further violations that have compelled them to flee once again, in the absence of effective accountability mechanisms or meaningful protection.

At the same time, there has been a concerning rise in hate speech and discriminatory practices targeting residents, particularly with regard to the use of names and symbols associated with Kurdish identity. These developments deepen an atmosphere of fear and exclusion and pose a serious threat to the social fabric of the region.

On this anniversary, the Lelun Association for Victims calls for:

- The immediate cessation of all violations against civilians in Afrin
- The guarantee of the right of all forcibly displaced persons to safe, voluntary, and dignified return, in accordance with international standards
- The restitution of property to its rightful owners and the provision of adequate compensation
- The clarification of the fate of the forcibly disappeared and the release of all those arbitrarily detained
- Accountability for all those responsible for these violations, regardless of their status, and an end to impunity
- The cessation of discriminatory policies and cultural restrictions, and the protection of the region’s diversity and local identity
- The annulment of arbitrary rulings issued by non-independent or partial courts

The continued absence of justice and redress not only undermines the rights of victims but also erodes any genuine prospects for achieving sustainable peace in Syria, in line with the principles of transitional justice and international human rights law.

On this anniversary, we stand in solidarity with victims and survivors and reaffirm our commitment to pursuing truth and justice, and to ensuring that such violations are not repeated