

No Ransom for One's Own Home

A Position Paper on Property

Seizure and Extortion in Afrin



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The Lelun Association for Victims is deeply concerned by the continued denial of many Afrin residents of their right to recover their homes, land, and property. After years of forced displacement, some rightful owners have returned to find their property still occupied by individuals with no legal entitlement to it. In many cases, occupants have demanded payment in exchange for vacating and returning the property. Requiring owners to pay money to regain possession of their own homes is not a voluntary settlement; it constitutes economic extortion and a continuation of the original unlawful seizure.

Complaints and testimonies received by the Association indicate that some of the occupied homes are currently inhabited by individuals who previously belonged to factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA), some of whom have since become members of the army or the General Security Service. Their transition into official military or security institutions has further intensified victims' sense of fear and helplessness, while, in some cases, their official position or influence has reportedly been used to obstruct the recovery of property or to demand financial payments from its rightful owners.

Affected individuals have also reported that the Public Prosecution Office has refused to register their complaints or dismissed them verbally on the grounds that the alleged perpetrators are military personnel. Lelun rejects this practice. Military status does not confer immunity from accountability for unlawful seizure or extortion, nor should questions of jurisdiction be used to deny victims access to justice. Even where another judicial authority has jurisdiction, complaints should be formally registered and referred to the competent authority, rather than leaving victims without an official record, a case number, or a clear legal avenue through which to pursue their rights.

The Association further emphasises that these cases should not be treated as ordinary civil disputes between parties of equal standing. Individuals occupying property do not acquire lawful rights simply because they have remained in possession for an extended period or because the rightful owners were forcibly absent. Likewise, any waiver, settlement, or payment obtained under the pressure of displacement, the urgent need to return home, or fear arising from military or security influence cannot be regarded as freely given consent and should not serve as a lawful basis for legitimising continued occupation or transferring ownership.



Accordingly, Lelun Association for Victims calls for the following measures:

1. Establish an independent and accessible mechanism in Afrin to facilitate the restitution of homes, land, and property, while ensuring effective protection for complainants and witnesses against threats or retaliation.
2. Prohibit all forms of eviction payments and extortion, investigate payments extracted under coercion, ensure that unlawfully obtained funds are returned to their rightful owners, and hold those responsible accountable.
3. Issue binding instructions to the army and General Security forces requiring full cooperation with the judiciary and prohibiting the use of military or security status to shield unlawful occupation or obstruct the restitution of property.

The return of property to its rightful owners is neither a political concession nor a form of compensation; it is a legal right that must be enforced. There can be no meaningful discussion of safe return or the rule of law while property owners are effectively required to purchase their own homes a second time, or while bearing arms or wearing an official uniform provides protection from complaint and accountability.



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