

# The Documentation of 117 Arrests in “Peace Spring” and “Olive Branch” Strips in August 2022



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## **The Documentation of 117 Arrests in “Peace Spring” and “Olive Branch” Strips in August 2022**

*107 persons, including 8 women and 11 children were arrested in Afrin region and 10 persons, among them a woman and a child were arrested in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions. Only 21 persons out of the total toll of the detainees were released, including two women and three children, while the fate of the rest 96 persons remains unknown.*

## Introduction

Hevdesti-Synergy Association for Victims documented the arrest of at least 117 persons, including 9 women and 12 children in August in 2022 in the regions of Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad, where the Turkish forces and factions affiliated with the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) are in control as a result of Olive Branch Operation conducted in 2018 and Peace Spring Operation in 2019.

The biggest toll of the detentions was felt in Afrin, where 107 persons were arrested, including 8 women and 11 children. But 10 persons, among them a woman and a child, were arrested in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad. Only 21 persons out of the total toll of the arrestees were released, among them two women and three children. The fate of the rest 96 detainees, including 7 women and 9 children remains unknown.

The majority of the detainees were arbitrarily arrested. Causes and charges behind their arrest varied. Some were accused of dealing with the Autonomous Administration or formerly working in its institutions. Others were accused of trying to cross to Turkey illegally. Some others were arrested in order to extort their families and get a ransom.

12 released persons told Hevdesti-Synergy that they were subjected to torture and ill-treatment during imprisonment in detention centers run by the opposition SNA-affiliated factions in Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad.

Hevdesti-Synergy Association relied in its documentation process on the information collected in its database provided by a network of field researchers and on information they obtained from the detainees' families and eyewitnesses. Furthermore, it verified the information from publicly available sources (open sources).

Hevdesti-Synergy Association notes that violations committed by Turkey and the SNA-affiliated factions in Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions are far more than what have been documented and verified as the Association believes that the actual number of arrest cases is significantly higher than the figure given in this report.

In a previous [report](#), Hevdesti-Synergy Association documented the arrest of at least 79 persons in "Peace Spring" and "Olive Branch" territories in July 2022. 63 persons from Afrin, including 4 women, and 16 further from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad were subjected to detention and deprivation of liberty.

## Legal Liability

The opposition SNA has violated the detainees' rights in accordance with the legal international obligations. Various SNA-affiliated factions have arbitrarily arrested and detained individuals and practiced cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment towards the detainees, the forcibly disappeared and their families in different ways. One way is the deliberate concealment of their fate and whereabouts in violation to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the fundamental human rights principles.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the effective removal of these persons from the protection of the law, if protection is found originally, and the failure to establish their fate constitutes a violation to the right to life.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of the continuous documented use of torture against detainees and the failure of the factions' commanders as well as leaders of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG)/the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) to take effective steps to prevent such practices, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the SNA may be practicing such conduct in pursuance of an organizational policy. Therefore, such conduct may be part of a systematic attack against the detainees in its custody, amounting to the crimes against humanity of torture.

The SNA forces are under effective command and control of the Turkish forces; therefore, the Turkish military commanders are held criminally responsible for violations committed by these parties [the SNA forces] in instances where the Turkish commanders knew or should have known about such crimes or failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures to prevent their commission.<sup>3</sup>

As an occupying power, Turkish authorities must ensure that their own officials and those under their command in the opposition SNA do not arbitrarily detain or mistreat anyone. The Turkish authorities are obliged to investigate alleged violations and ensure that those responsible are appropriately punished.

## Arrests in Olive Branch Strip

Hevdesti-Synergy documented the arrest of 107 persons, among them 8 women and 11 children, in August 2022 in the Kurdish-majority region of Afrin. 18 individuals, including 2 women and 2 girls have been released so far while

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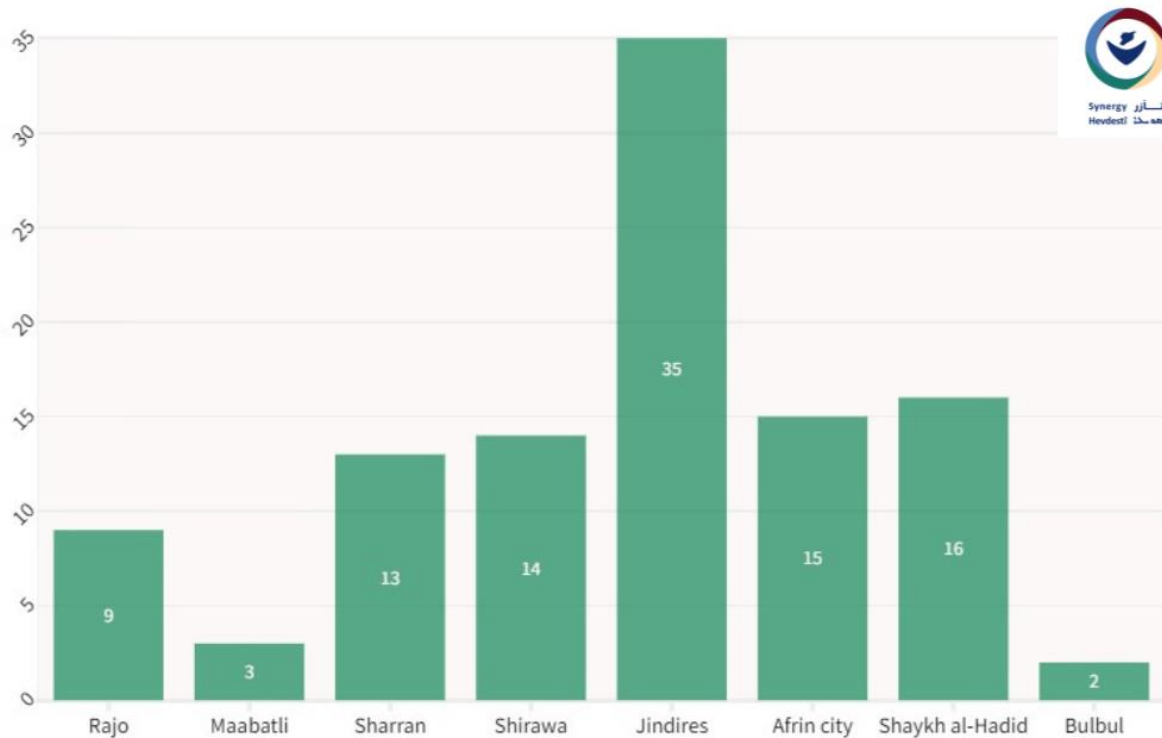
<sup>1</sup> ICRC Rule 98. Enforced disappearance is also characterized as a composite war crime by ICRC; See Rule 156.

<sup>2</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, general comment no. 36 (2018), para 58.

<sup>3</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 28.

the fate of the rest 89 detainees, among them 6 women and 9 children is still unaccounted for.

The biggest toll of arrests in August 2022 was felt in Jindires District as 35 persons were arrested. The other arrests were distributed in Afrin region as follows: 16 in Shaykh al-Hadid district, 15 in Afrin city and the adjacent villages, 14 in Shirawa district, 13 in Sharran district, 9 in Rajo district, 3 in Maabatli/Mabeta and 2 in Bulbul district.



Geographical distribution of the arbitrary arrests carried out by factions of the opposition SNA in Afrin region in August 2022

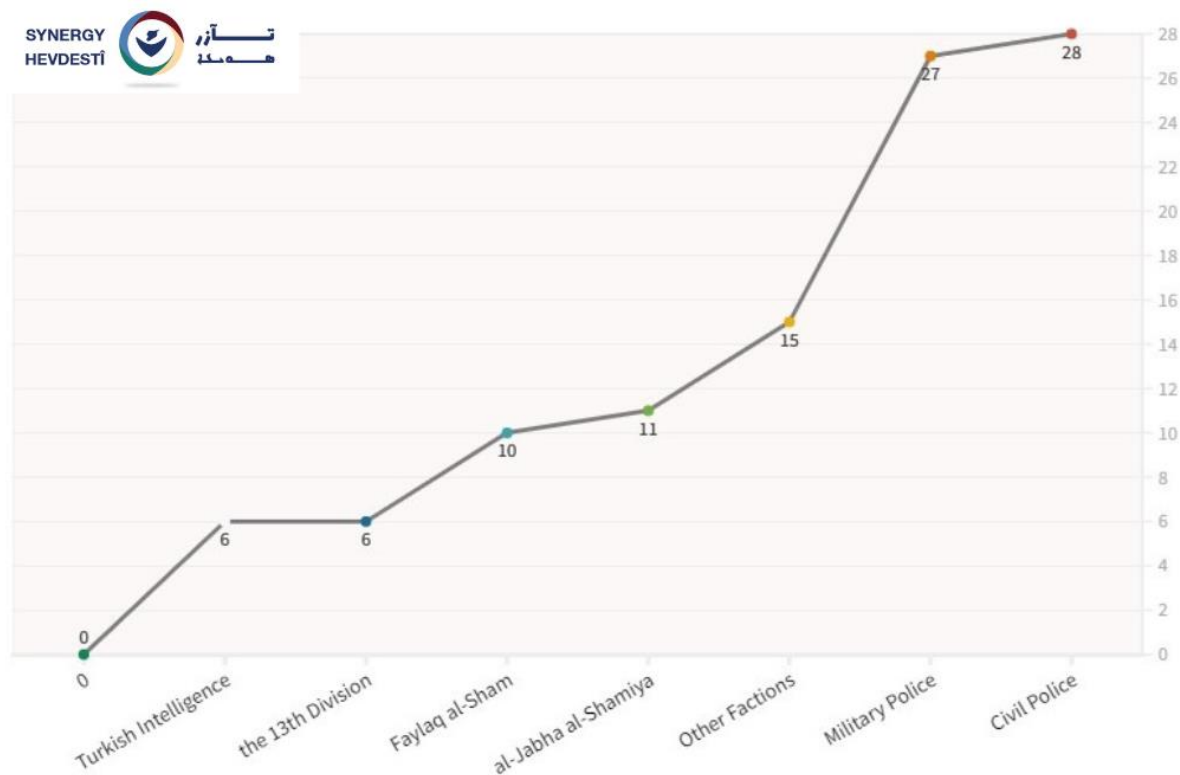
The SNA's police forces were responsible for more than half of the total toll of the arrests in Afrin in August 2022. The Civil Police was behind 28 arrests while the Military Police was behind 27 others, while the Turkish Intelligence forces conducted at least six arrests.

Other SNA-affiliated factions carried out the other cases of arrests as following: 11 at the hands of the Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya, 10 at the hands of the Sham Legion/Faylaq al-Sham, 6 at the hands of the 13<sup>th</sup> Division, 4 at the hands of the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat). Other factions, which Hevdesti-Synergy could not identify them precisely, were responsible for 15 cases of the arrests in "Olive Branch" strip.



Hevdesti-Synergy has investigated the responsibility of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), which is listed as a terrorist organization, of one single case of arrest in Kabashin village in Sherawa district, Afrin countryside.

The SNA-affiliated factions charged at least 33 detainees in Afrin region of dealing with the Autonomous Administration or formerly working in its institutions. The Civil Police demanded a family of one of the detainees to pay 300 UDS as a ransom for his release.



Factions of the opposition SNA that took part in the arbitrary arrests in Afrin area in Aug 2022

## Arrests in “Peace Spring” Strip

In August 2022, the opposition SNA-affiliated factions arrested at least 10 persons, including a woman and a child, in the two regions of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad, which Turkey has occupied since October 2019 in Peace Spring Operation. Only 3 persons have been released so far while the fate of the other seven detainees remains unknown.

The Military Police was responsible for arresting at least 5 persons, while other SNA-affiliated factions were responsible for the other cases. The majority of the arrests were conducted with a view to extort the detainees’ families and ask them to pay ransom in exchange for their release.

A civilian who was released told Hevdesti-Synergy that Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Gathering of Free Men of the East, affiliated with the SNA, had extorted his family and forced them to pay 23,000 USD in exchange for his release. He was arrested near the town of [Suluk](#) in Tall Abyad countryside while he was on his way back from work.

The witness said he was arbitrarily arrested. He narrated to Hevdesti-Synergy details of his arrest: <sup>4</sup>

**“I was arrested on 3 August 2022 on the road that goes from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê to Tall Abyad. An armed group of the Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya stopped our vehicle at one of its checkpoints and arrested me along with some other young men. We were hand cuffed and blindfolded. Members of the armed group treated us badly and used derogatory language against us all the way long to the detention center. We did not know why we were arrested.”**

The witness was moved to a detention center run by Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya in Suluk town. He remained in custody for 11 days. He described the situation in the prison as following:

**“I was never interrogated during imprisonment. I was hand cuffed all the time and it caused cuts to my wrists and terrible pain. They refused to unlock the handcuff or bring some medicine although I persisted calling for. They asked me to give them the phone number of one of my family members so that they could reach him. I knew the that they would call him to ask for money in exchange for my release.”**

The detainee’s family reluctantly submitted to Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya’s extortion fearful for their son’s life. The witness was released on 14 August 2022 after the armed group obtained 23,000 USD. The witness said:

**“Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya asked my family to pay 22,000 USD for my release. My family had no choice but to pay. Members of the armed group also looted 1,000 USD I had in my pocket, then they released me.”**

Hevdesti-Synergy documented the arrest of at least 488 persons, including 65 women and 37 children, at the hands of Turkish forces and Turkey-backed factions of the opposition SNA in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions since the start of the Turkish Peace Spring operation on 9 October 2019 until the end of July 2022. Moreover, at least 299 cases of torture, in

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<sup>4</sup> The interview was conducted via the Internet on 25 August 2022. The witness’s information is withheld upon his request.

which five individuals have died under torture, were documented in detention centers operated by these factions.





SYNERGY تآزر  
HEVDESTÎ همصدئ

رابطة "تآزر – Hevdestî" للضحايا، هي مؤسسة غير حكومية، غير ربحية، تهدف إلى إنشاء منبر ومساحة تُمكن الضحايا من تمثيل أنفسهم بأنفسهم والمطالبة بحقوقهم. تأسست الرابطة في 11 آذار/مارس 2021، سعياً لإنصاف ضحايا النزاع في شمال وشرق سوريا، والمساهمة في عملية المساءلة وتحقيق العدالة.

نعمل على توثيق كافة انتهاكات حقوق الإنسان في شمال وشرق سوريا، وحفظ الأدلة والوثائق والشهادات إسهاماً في عمليات كشف الحقيقة والمساءلة وتحقيق العدالة، وبناء قدرات الضحايا ومناصرة قضاياهم، من أجل بناء مجتمع مطالب بحقوقه.

نلتزم بأعلى درجات الدقة والنزاهة، بما في ذلك البحث عن وجهات نظر متعددة لتطوير فهم معمق وتحليلي للأحداث. ندرك حجم مسؤوليتنا تجاه الضحايا والشهود الذين شاركوا تجاربهم معنا، ونعمل بشكل وثيق مع مجموعة واسعة من الجهات الفاعلة في المجتمع المدني المحلي والدولي لتحقيق أكبر تأثير ممكن.