

Northern Syria: Kurds in Afrin Victims of Lack of Accountability and Continued Impunity



March 2023



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Introduction:

Four Kurdish civilians of the same family were killed and three others were injured, as they were directly shot by fighters of opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) backed by [Turkey](#), on March 20, 2023, in Jindires town, located in Afrin countryside in northern [Syria](#), on the backdrop of celebrating Newroz Day, the Kurdish New Year.¹

The attack took place on the eve of Newroz Day when fighters of Jaysh al-Sharqiya/the Construction and Liberation Movement opened fire directly on the Kurdish family members as they were celebrating Newroz in front of their house located in Jindires and lighting its bonfire, one of the most important rituals adopted by the Kurds annually, with the participation of other peoples in Syria and throughout the region. As a result of the attack, three Kurdish brothers and the son of one of them were killed, while one of the relatives was seriously injured and two others were slightly injured.

The four victims are the brothers Farah al-Din Othman, 43, Mohammed Othman, 42, Nazmi Othman, 38, and Mohamed Othman, 19, son of Farah al-Din. Synergy has previously documented the arrest and severe torture of the victim Farah al-Din at the hands of Jaysh al-Sharqiya fighters after they entered Afrin in 2018 as he demanded to restore his house which the faction's fighters had seized.

Synergy spoke to one of the victims' surviving relatives, two witnesses and activists from the area, and it reviewed images and video footages of the crime, concluding that the attack against the victims was aimed to prevent them from reviving the celebration rituals of Newroz.

Since 2018, Turkey has occupied the Syrian Kurdish region of Afrin as a result of its military operation named "[Olive Branch](#)" with the participation of the Turkish-backed SNA's factions. The operation killed dozens of civilians and led to the displacement of tens of thousands according to the United Nations. Since then, more than [40 different factions](#) of the SNA assumed control on Afrin's villages and towns. Synergy verified the effective control of Jaysh al-Sharqiya, affiliated with the [Construction and Liberation Movement](#), on several neighborhoods of Jindires, including the well-known "Industrial Area" where the crime took place.²

¹ The word Newroz in Kurdish means "new day" and it is the Kurdish New Year or the national Day of the Kurdish people as well as other peoples in the world. According to the [UN](#), Newroz marks the first day of the new year and is celebrated by more than 300 million people all around the world and has been celebrated for over 3,000 years, most notably in Central Asia, the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Middle East, the Caucasus and other regions. This Day, as it embodies the unity of the cultural heritage and traditions that date back to many centuries, plays a significant role in strengthening the ties among peoples based on mutual respect and the ideals of peace and good neighborliness. Newroz's traditions and rituals reflect the cultural and ancient customs of the civilizations of the East and West, which influenced those civilizations through the interchange of human values.

² On February 15, 2022, [Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya](#)/Free Men of the East, [Jaysh al-Sharqiya, the 20th Division](#), and Suqour al-Sham Brigade/the Northern Hawks Brigade (Northern Sector), affiliated with the Turkish-backed SNA, declared integration under the so-called [Construction and Liberation Movement](#). Major Hussein al-Hamadi, commander of Jaysh al-Sharqiya was assigned the leader of the new Movement while Abu Hatem Shaqra, Commander of Ahrar al-Sharqiya was appointed as the Deputy.

It is not the first time Afrin-occupied by Turkey and its proxies SNA factions since March 2018- has witnessed crimes and human rights violations. Several independent local and international organizations and UN commissions have documented repeated and systematic patterns of human rights violations, such as [murder](#), [arbitrary detention](#), [enforced disappearance](#), ill-treatment, [torture](#), [looting](#), and [property seizure](#), in addition to [forcing](#) the Kurd inhabitants to leave their houses, [obstructing the return of the native](#) people and practices of [Turkification](#) and [demographic changes](#).

Prior to the Turkish occupation of Afrin in 2018, hundreds of thousands of its Kurdish inhabitants were celebrating their National Newroz Day in its picturesque nature. However, since the last five years, the remaining Kurds in Afrin could not celebrate Newroz due to the continuous suppression and violations perpetuated by factions of the Turkish-backed SNA.

Mass protests:

Following the crime of murder, massive public demonstrations took place in Jindires and other areas in Afrin. Protesters denounced the de-facto authorities and demanded the ousting of the SNA's factions from the region and providing international protection for the civilians to put an end to the violations committed by those factions.

On the night of the crime, hundreds of residents transported the victims' bodies to [Atme](#) village in Idlib countryside, where they demanded that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which controls Idlib area and large areas of western Aleppo, to intervene and hold accountable the perpetrators. A [video footage](#) circulated on social media showed that the HTS' leader [Abu Mohammed al-Julani](#) met with the victims' relatives and addressed them as saying: "This is the last day you will be attacked. You are under my protection. You will return to your homes in dignity", but one of the women replied, "We do not want factions, we do not want factions."



The image taken from the [video footage](#) shows that the HTS' leader Abu Mohammed al-Julani is meeting relatives of the victims of the crime that took place on Newroz Eve in Jindires, as well as hundreds of protesters in Atme village as he vows to protect them.

The terrorist-designated organization took this crime as a pretext to advance in Jindires and its countryside, as it intensified its security deployment on the next morning, corresponding to March 21, 2023, and news spread that it controlled the military headquarters of Jaysh al-Sharqiya faction and the Military Police branch in the city.

The burial ceremony of the victims on March 21, 2023 turned into a mass public protest in Jindires and in other areas in Afrin, where the protestors carried olive branches and the victims' bodies that were wrapped in the Kurdish flag and raised banners reading: "Five years of injustice, oppression and demographic change. No to killing Kurdish civilians. We demand an end to the crimes and finding radical solutions for the region." The protestors called for an international protection and putting an end for the violations the Turkish-backed opposition SNA are committing.



A side of the public protests in Jindires on March 21, 2023. Photo Cedit: photographer [Ammar al-Zeer](#)

Regarding the demands the protests in Jindires and in other areas in Afrin called for, one of the protestors spoke to Synergy saying:³

“This heinous crime targeted unarmed innocent people, and it is added to the litany of crimes and violations that are being committed in Afrin region for over five years. We therefore took to the streets to say enough injustice and oppression and to demand that the perpetrators to be held accountable, that the SNA’s factions to be expelled from the region and that protection be provided for the civilians. All of us here are in danger today, living in severe injustice. We are subjected to daily violations, we pay ransoms and royalties, and our agricultural crops are seized.”

³ The interview was conducted virtually on March 22, 2023. The witness’s information is withheld for his safety.



Circulated images showing a side of the public protests in Jindires on March 21, 2023.

Attempts to Mislead Facts:

Only few hours after the crime, Ahmed al-Hayes, known as [Abu Hatem Shaqra](#), Commander of Tajammu' Ahrar al-Sharqiya and Deputy Commander of the [Construction and Liberation Movement](#) denied on [Twitter](#) that his forces were responsible for killing four Kurdish civilians in Jindires district in Afrin countryside, noting that his forces have got no headquarters in the district.



Abu Hatem Shaqra's Tweet, in which he denied the responsibility of his forces for the crime committed in Jindires on Newroz Eve.

The testimonies and information obtained and verified by Synergy confirm that the perpetrators who committed the crime that took place Newroz Eve in Jindires belong to Jaysh al-Sharqiya faction, which operates under the Construction and Liberation Movement affiliated with the Turkish-backed opposition SNA.

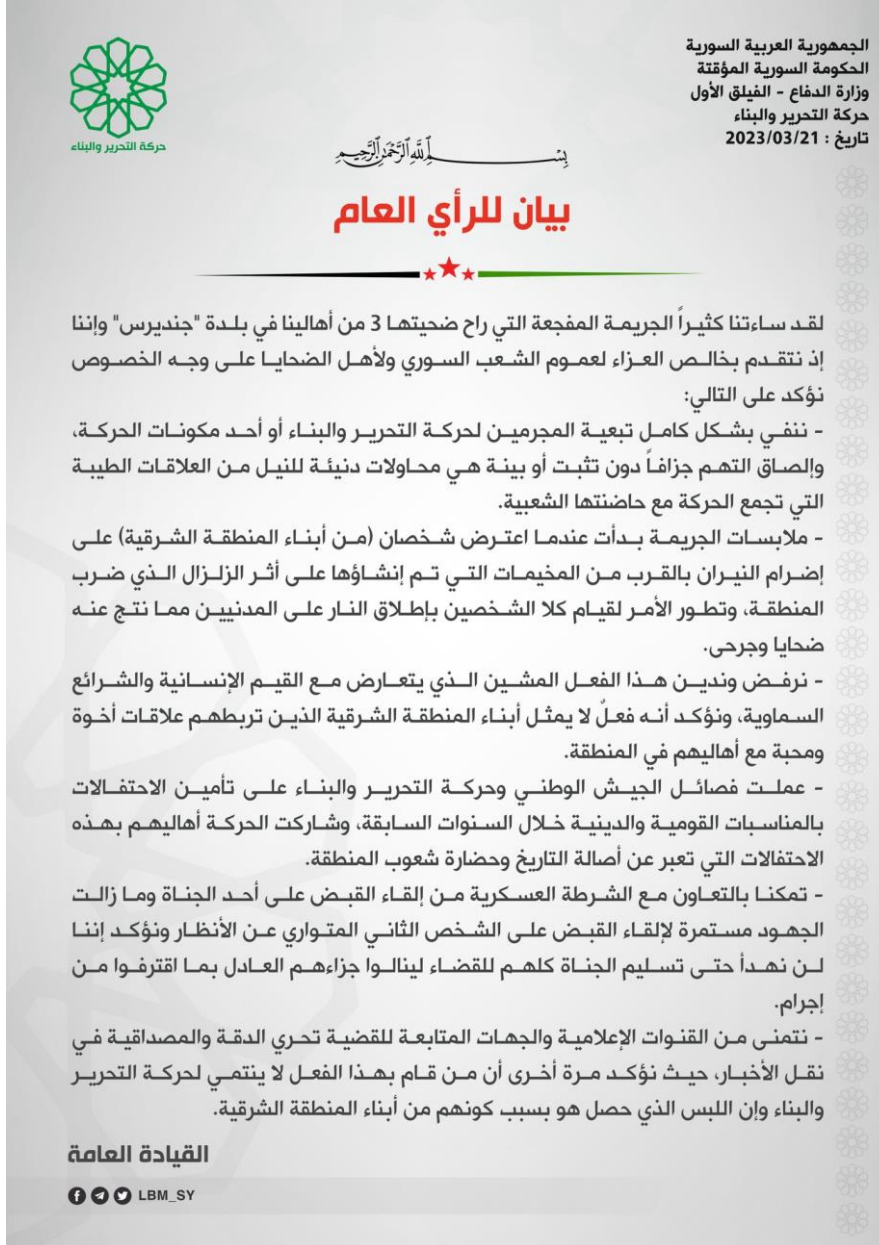
On March 21, 2023, the [Syrian Interim Government](#) (SIG)'s Defense Ministry issued a [statement](#), in which it made no mention of the responsibility of its forces for the crime, alleging that the crime took place as a result of a fight between residents of the neighborhood and two other men, one of whom was a civilian and the other was a fighter, following which the perpetrators opened fire and then fled away.

An Attempt to Sow Discord:

In addition to attempting to evade the responsibility of its forces for the crime, there is a reason to believe that the Construction and Liberation Movement, affiliated with the First

Legion in the SNA, may have attempted to push for a discord between the Syrian local communities, notably between the Arabs and the Kurds in the region of eastern Euphrates/northeastern Syria, controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Only one day following the crime, the Construction and Liberation Movement published a [statement](#), in which denying the affiliation of the crime's perpetrators to the Movement or to any of its components, adding that the perpetrators are two individuals from the eastern region (meaning from Deir ez-Zor governorate) and that the Movement had arrested one of them and is still searching for the second person who is in the run.



الجمهورية العربية السورية
الحكومة السورية المؤقتة
وزارة الدفاع - الفيلق الأول
حركة التحرير والبناء
تاريخ: 2023/03/21




بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

بيان للرأي العام

لقد ساءت بنا كثيراً الجريمة المفجعة التي راح ضحيتها 3 من أهاليها في بلدة "جنديرس" وإنما إذ نتقدم بخالص العزاء لعموم الشعب السوري ولأهل الضحايا على وجه الخصوص نؤكد على التالي:

- ننفي بشكل كامل تبعية المجرمين لحركة التحرير والبناء أو أحد مكونات الحركة، والصاق التهم جزافاً دون تثبت أو بينة هي محاولات دنيئة للنيل من العلاقات الطيبة التي تجمع الحركة مع حاضنتها الشعبية.
- ملامسات الجريمة بدأت عندما اعترض شخصان (من أبناء المنطقة الشرقية) على إضرام النيران بالقرب من المخيمات التي تم إنشاؤها على أثر الزلزال الذي ضرب المنطقة، وتطور الأمر لقيام كلا الشخصين بإطلاق النار على المدنيين مما نتج عنه ضحايا وجرحى.
- نرفض وندين هذا الفعل المشين الذي يتعارض مع القيم الإنسانية والشرائع السماوية، ونؤكد أنه فعل لا يمثل أبناء المنطقة الشرقية الذين تربطهم علاقات أخوة ومحبة مع أهاليهم في المنطقة.
- عملت فصائل الجيش الوطني وحركة التحرير والبناء على تأمين الاحتفالات بالمناسبات القومية والدينية خلال السنوات السابقة، وشاركت الحركة أهاليهم بهذه الاحتفالات التي تعبر عن أصالة التاريخ وحضارة شعوب المنطقة.
- تمكنا بالتعاون مع الشرطة العسكرية من إلقاء القبض على أحد الجناة وما زالت الجهود مستمرة لإلقاء القبض على الشخص الثاني المتواري عن الأنظار ونؤكد أننا لن نهدأ حتى تسليم الجناة كلهم للقضاء لينالوا جزاءهم العادل بما اقترفوا من إجرام.
- نتمنى من القنوات الإعلامية والجهات المتابعة للقضية تحري الدقة والمصداقية في نقل الأخبار، حيث نؤكد مرة أخرى أن من قام بهذا الفعل لا ينتمي لحركة التحرير والبناء وإن اللبس الذي حصل هو بسبب كونهم من أبناء المنطقة الشرقية.

القيادة العامة




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The image shows the statement of Construction and Liberation Movement, which was released on March 21, 2023 concerning the crime of killing the Kurdish civilians while they were celebrating the coming of Newroz in Jindires. Photo Credit: the [Construction and Liberation Movement](#).

