

Northern Syria: Women as Victims in Various Forms, from Domestic Violence to Violations and Conflict-Related Crimes

Women in Syria continue to be victims on multiple fronts. While dozens of women were subjected to murder, violence and committed suicide due to gender-based social grounds, others were killed in the deliberate and repeated Turkish bombardment on infrastructure and civilian objects in northeast Syria. Meanwhile, scores of women were arrested and tortured in areas occupied by Turkey, claiming to be safe zones

Introduction:

On February 27, 2024, a widely circulated [video](#) on social media showed a girl being violently beaten with sticks and iron bars. Some men and boys/children took turns assaulting her as the girl's screams echoed throughout the video, pleading her innocence by repeatedly saying "I swear by God, I am a girl", meaning she is "virgin". Despite the bystanders silently watching, one of them documented the crime that took place in Tel al-Samen Village, located in Raqqa Province¹.

Following that, another video was circulated, albeit with limited circulation, showing the victim's sister also being beaten and ill-treated in another location within the same village. It was said that the two sisters were beaten and abused because they were accused of having love affair outside the wedlock.

The case, known on social media as "The Tel al-Samen Girl," and circulated under this hashtag, has garnered attention from both local and international media outlets. It represents a disturbing instance of violence against women under the guise of "honor." Following the dissemination of the video, the Internal Security Forces of the Autonomous Administration, also known as the Asayish, apprehended two of the perpetrators, while the third remains at large, as stated in a released [statement](#) by the Asayish. It was further revealed that one of the perpetrators is the girl's uncle, and the others are her cousins. Fortunately, both girls survived, and they are currently under the protection of the Women's House of the Autonomous Administration.

Over 2023, [Sara](#) Organization to Combat Violence Against Women, which is active in northern and eastern Syria, documented no less than 180 cases of beating, abuse and violence against women. Additionally, 21 cases of murder, 73 cases of suicide were documented, believed to largely result from domestic violence and mental pressure.

Violence against women extends beyond domestic and societal violence; women are also subjected to arbitrary arrest in the areas occupied by Turkey along with factions of the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA), such as in Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, and Tall Abyad, where Turkey alleged they are safe zones. In 2023, Synergy Association for Victims documented the arrest of 22 women, the killing of nine women, and the injury of 19 others due to Turkish attacks with drones and warplanes on areas in northeast Syria.

¹ Synergy Association does not recommend the readers to watch the video showing a girl being violently beaten with sticks and iron bars in Tel al-Samen Village in Raqqa countryside. It depicts harsh and cruel scenes of a girl lying on the ground while seven young men take turns hitting her with sticks for 55 seconds. Throughout the video, she screams and says, "I swear by God I am a girl/virgin; I swear by God I am a girl/virgin", reaffirming her virginity.

“I Swear I am A Girl”/Virgin:

“A woman enduring violence echoes a universal truth – a collective resonance of shared struggles.”.

Said, [Hadeel Salem](#), independent journalist, in a campaign launched by Synergy on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Women's organizations condemned the crime in a statement delivered to media outlets in al-Naim Square in the center of Raqqa City, the same square where the Islamic State (ISIS) was executing people and implementing retributive justice (*Qisas* in Ar), in a clear symbolism highlighting the unequivocal rejection of violence in all its forms. The statement declared that **“women worldwide are subjected almost daily to violence and murder under the pretext of the so-called “honor” and the misguided religious traditions that have no connection to humanity or moral decency.”** Moreover, the statement considered the crimes committed against women as **“widespread social illnesses that continue through oppressive methods and brutal violations, aiming to exclude women from participating in organizational spaces, self-development, and all aspects of life.”**

Furthermore, the social religious figure “Mourshid Ma’shouq al-Khaznawi” condemned the incident through an [interview](#) on Arta FM, denying that religious motives were involved, but rather attributing it to outdated social customs.

According to the article 50 of the [Social Contract](#) endorsed by the Autonomous Administration in late 2023, "All forms of violence against women, exploitation, or imposition of negative discrimination against them shall be considered crimes punishable by law."

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Synergy Association launched a campaign in which active women took part. One of the participants was the civil activist [Arya Omari](#), who said:

“Gender-based violence will cease only when prevailing concepts about gender and social roles change and are corrected. Such correction would be fully achieved within the framework of a comprehensive change, through drawing up new policies that ensure economic and social justice for all, confirming the independence of the judiciary and its compliance with humanitarian laws and international agreements in combating discrimination, and reforming educational institutions. An integrated socio-economic political program, targeting all state institutions and community, is essential.”

Women Victims of Conflict:

Hello, World! I am Farah. My mother and I were harvesting cotton when Turkey pounded us, leaving me without my legs. I can no longer walk or play.”

During 2023, areas of northeast Syria were under repeated attacks and aggressions by Turkey, including two violent campaigns with drones and warplanes. One of the campaigns started on October 5 while the second on December 24. 111 raids were recorded in the two Turkish attacks which were against vital infrastructure, oil and energy sources and the facilities indispensable to the survival of the civilian populations. The attacks claimed the lives of nine civilians and injured more than 20 others, according to Synergy’s documentations.

On October 9, during the first campaign, Synergy documented the injury of the child girl, Farah, who was working with her family in harvesting cotton alongside other workers to support their families in al-Beshiriya Village in the countryside of al-Dirbasiyah Town in northeast Syria. As a consequence, Farah lost her two legs, and three other workers were injured.

During the second campaign, the 33-year-old young woman, Berivan Mohammed, who was the only girl to her parents, was killed when Turkish drones hit Simav Printing Press which prints schoolbooks. Four other members of the printing press staff were also killed as a result of the shelling.

Fear of Arrest Haunts Women:

In mid-March 2023, Nisreen Mohammed, an alias, was astonished when a group of armed men stormed her house in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê City, and took away her husband after he was blindfolded, handcuffed, headbutted, and beaten on the back with the butts of the men’s guns Kalashnikov; all in front of her and her terrified children.

The fate of Nisreen’s husband remains unaccounted for despite her repeated attempts to clarify any information about him. He was arrested by forces of the Military Police, affiliated with the SNA. Like many other families of the arbitrary detained and forcibly disappeared by the SNA, Nisreen is suffering from a general feeling of anguish, hardship, and confusion as protection was not provided to her and she was left to manage her affairs alone.

Women suffer from arrest whether they are direct victims or relatives of detainees, as in the case of Mrs. Mohammed. The arrest of at least 22 women has been documented in Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, and Tall Abyad regions in northern Syria at the hands of Turkish forces and the Turkish-backed SNA’s factions.

Over the years of Turkish and the SNA’s control on areas of Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, and Tall Abyad in northern Syria, Synergy has documented dozens of cases of female survivors from arrest and torture. These cases reveal the atrocities women have faced, with

recurring patterns of torture ranging from psychological and physical harm, including beatings and insults, to cases of verbal and physical rape.

Sorrowed by the Seizure of Her House, Woman Dies:

Since the Turkish military operation "Olive Branch" in 2018, the SNA's factions, specifically Suqour al-Sham Brigade, has seized the house belonging to a civilian woman, Malak Khalil Ibo, 63, in [Ali Jaro](#) Village, administratively following [Bulbul](#) District in [Afrin](#) countryside. Despite all her efforts to reclaim her home, she was unsuccessful. After spending three years as a displaced person in al-Shahba region, she returned to Afrin only to pass away, carrying with her the sorrow and regret of not being able to return to her home.



In the images above, circulated by activists from Afrin, the criminal, known as "Asmar", is seen standing and observing the body of the homeowner whom he forcibly seized the house from, using power and armed threats, preventing her from entering while she was still alive. The cause of her death was reportedly due to distress and despair.

The victim Ibo passed away as a result of a stroke after receiving threats from members of Suqour al-Sham Brigade prior to her death, according to her relatives who spoke to Synergy. This occurred after she filed a complaint demanding to reclaim her house and the olive groves she owned in Ali Jaro Village in the countryside of occupied Afrin.

The criminal Asmar Abo al-Iz, is the security and economic officer in charge in Suqour al-Sham Brigade within the SNA in Ali Jaro Village. He seized the properties of the victim and her family since the Turkish occupation of Afrin in 2018. In addition to seizing the victim's house and properties, he subjected her to compounded distress since summer 2022. She returned to her village and demanded the retrieval of her house and family properties. However, Asmar and his group prevented her from entering the house and threatened her with death to force her to relinquish her rights, which caused a deterioration in her health condition.

The deceased was a mother of seven and had made a will, asking that her body be brought to her home before burial. With the intervention of village elders, the officer allowed her corpse to be [transferred](#) to the house before completing the burial ceremony in her village.



A screenshot taken from the circulated video, showing mourners carrying the body of the victim, Malak Ibo, as they walk around her house, which was seized by Suqour al-Sham Brigade.

The Turkish-occupied Afrin region is rife with countless of human rights violations perpetrated by Turkish forces and the Turkish-backed SNA's factions. These documented violations include summary executions, enforced disappearance, property seizure, pillage, preventing the return of the residents, mostly the Kurds, Turkification and demographic changes.

In its [report](#) titled “Where is My Home: Property Rights Violations in Northern Syria Perpetuate Demographic Change”, Synergy Associations has previously documented systematic and repeated patterns of looting and property appropriation belonging to civilians in “Peace Spring” and “Olive Branch” strips, particularly those committed outside the context of military operations, such as the unlawful seizure, scorching, sale or destroying real estates, and expelling the indigenous people, forcing them to leave the area.

