

After a Year on Newroz Crime in Afrin: Victims' Families Still Seek Justice

With the advent of March 20, people in Jindires City in Afrin countryside recall the horrific crime that claimed the lives of four young men from the same family on the eve of Newroz 2023. Despite a suspended death penalty was issued against three perpetrators, the "Peshmerga" Family still awaits justice for their loved ones. It appears that the court's verdict is hard to be enforced and the family believe that one of the main perpetrators has gone unpunished. This comes amidst ongoing and varied violations and pressures against the victims' family members, aimed at pushing them to close the case and drop the charges against the perpetrators

Introduction:

On March 18, 2018, the Turkish Army, alongside factions of the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA), entered the Syrian Kurdish city of Afrin nearly two months after battles within the military operation dubbed “Olive Branch” by Ankara. The operation led to the occupation of Afrin region, killed dozens of civilians and displaced more than 300,000 people, the majority of whom were Kurds.

Since then, Afrin region has been under a continuous arbitrary rule, and countless of human rights violations have been carried out by the Turkish forces and SNA factions, which are led and backed by Turkey. The documented violations include [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](#).

Testimonies and evidences collected by Synergy indicate that the violations perpetuated in Afrin region are targeted against the Kurdish civilians, aligning closely with Turkey’s declared objectives of weakening the Kurdish presence in northeast Syria and establishing a security belt or a buffer zone between Turkey’s southern borders and the areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria.

Prior to the Turkish occupation of Afrin in 2018, hundreds of thousands of its Kurdish inhabitants were celebrating Newroz in its picturesque nature. However, for the last six years, the remaining Kurds in Afrin could not celebrate Newroz due to the continuous suppression and violations committed against them by factions of the Turkish-backed SNA. Upon their initial entry into Afrin, these factions deliberately [destroyed](#) the statue of “Kawa, the Blacksmith¹”- located in the city center- which holds significant Kurdish symbolism, representing liberation from oppression. Every year, people celebrate the anniversary of “Kawa, the Blacksmith” by lighting bonfire on the eve of Newroz (the Kurdish New Year, or the National Day of the Kurdish people².)

A year after the occupation of Afrin, the Local Council in Afrin, affiliated with the Interim Syrian Government (SIG)/the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, sought to [prohibit](#) the celebration rituals of Newroz Day, before reluctantly allowing them in the subsequent years.

¹ It is a Kurdish legendary character believed to be a symbolism for emancipation from oppression and the ritual of lighting bonfire is linked to this character. The demolition of the statue, from the perspective of the locals and activists, is one aspect of the spirits violations against the Kurdish people.

² 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.

Omar al-Asmar, Habib Khalaf, and Bilal al-Aboud, and issued a three years' imprisonment, a ruling susceptible of cassation appeal, against Ali Khalaf, known as Abu Habib al-Khasham.

Courts affiliated with the SIG/opposition rely on Syrian law previously enforced in prosecuting such crimes; however, death penalties ruled by the opposition courts are (suspended), as the SIG has not determined a legal mechanism for the signature and implementation of its courts decisions, such as death penalties, as was previously practiced in Syria, where such sentences were referred to the President of the State and the Grand Mufti [Islamic jurisconsult] for signature.

Nearly a year after the Newroz Crime in Afrin, specifically on March 13, 2024, Jindires City, in Afrin, witnessed another crime that made headlines on [social media](#). A minor Kurdish boy, named Ahmed Khalid Ma'mo Madde, 16, was killed and his body was thrown in a water well on the road in Jindires countryside. [Activists](#) have linked the killing of the minor child to the crime of killing four young men from a single family on the eve of Newroz 2023.

In less than two days after the underage Ahmed was killed, another child, named Rodi Mohammed Jaqal, was [stabbed](#) with knives by masked men in Jindires City.

Today, with the approaching of March 20, the locals of Jindires recall the heinous crime that claimed the lives of four young men from the same family. Despite suspended death penalties were issued against three perpetrators, the Peshmerg Family, whom the four victims belonged, still await justice and redress to be provided for their loved ones. It seems that the court's decision is hard to be enforced. They see the accused Ali Khalaf/Abu Habib al-Khasham, who was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, as the main perpetrator and instigator of the crime. However, he got a mitigated sentence although several eyewitnesses confirmed before the court that he directly shot the victims and instigated their murder. Another perpetrator identified as Abdullah Abdulhamid Abdullah, who participated in the shooting, fled away. The victims' family are exposed to continuous and different violations and pressure to push them withdraw the claim.

Awaiting Justice:

“Since the crime committed against our family on the eve of Newroz 2023 to this date, we have been living in a state of terror and fear due to the constant threats we receive from Jaysh al-Sharqiya in order to force us to drop the case.” This is what one of the members of the locally known "Osman" Family, also known as the Peshmerg Family, said. Four of their members were killed as a result of being directly shot on the eve of Newroz 2023. The family was also among the victims of the devastating earthquake. They currently reside in a tent set up near their home, the site of the crime.

Members of the family, speaking to Synergy Association for Victims, say that they are still paying the price of that crime and that they are exposed to several pressures, aiming at forcing them to drop the charges. One of them in his testimony to Synergy said:

