

Afrin's IDPs: Six Years of Fear and Waiting to Return Home



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Umm Muhammad and her family were forcibly displaced from Afrin, a [Kurdish-majority region](#) in Aleppo's countryside, six years ago. She left her house but kept its key in the hopes that she would return there someday.

Umm Mohammad is only one of dozens of thousands of people who wait to return to their home villages after the 2018 Turkish invasion, carried out with the support of several Syrian armed opposition groups. The incursion rendered [nearly 300,000](#) of Afrin's locals internally displaced.

Relating his mother's experience with displacement, Muhammad (25) said, *"That key—it is the only reminder of our house in one of Rajo district's villages. It is also what helps my mother hold on to the dream of returning there."*

The Kurdish young man reminisced about his family's villa-shaped house, which lay in the embrace of over 500 olive trees. A "judge" from the Ahfad al-Rasul Brigade (Grandsons of the Prophet) seized the house and settled his family after Türkiye-controlled armed groups dominated the region.

Muhammad said they once asked a relative, who returned to the Afrin region shortly after the incursion, to check on their house. The judge expelled that relative and told him to warn Muhammad's family against returning to Afrin.

"Safe Zone"

Establishing a safe zone in northern Syria was one of the pretexts Türkiye used to justify its incursion into the Afrin region. Nevertheless, the targeted area remains far from being safe, according to several IDPs who gave matching accounts of the horrifying situation in their villages.

Claims of safety are also refuted by Human Rights Watch in a late February 2024 [report](#). The organization said that the region is "rife with human rights abuses committed primarily by factions of the Syrian National Army, and the lives of the region's 1.4 million people are characterized by legal chaos and insecurity."

A second victim of rampant property rights abuses is the forcibly displaced Hamida Mustafa (41). Hamida had an apartment in the al-Mahmoudiyah neighbourhood, north of Afrin city, and lived there with her family up until 2018. After the incursion, the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division confiscated her apartment.

Hamida, a mother of three, said, *"My neighbours are witnesses to the confiscation of my house by a member of the al-Hamzat [Division]. He sold our belongings—including furniture, carpets, and the solar panels—before he brought his family in."*

“Barbaric Torture”

While many Afrin IDPs share the story of being victims of property seizures by the Syrian armed opposition groups, they each had their own unique suffering and struggles with the impacts these seizures had on their lives.

With his children and grandchildren, Hussain Sido fled the suburbs of Ma'abatli district after the Turkish invasion. Scenes from his journey of displacement flash vividly in his head every time Afrin is mentioned.

Hussain, now living in al-Hasakah city, said that he lost all his properties in the Afrin region. He learned that the families of two fighters with armed groups that once operated in Eastern Ghouta, in Rif Dimashq (Damascus Countryside), are currently residing in his and his elder son's houses.

The sixty-something man also narrated the story of his neighbour, Hammou. The neighbour returned to the village, not knowing the Sultan Murad Division would arrest him, alleging he worked with the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).

Hussain believes returning to the region is extremely difficult, saying that his neighbour Hammou experienced all kinds of suffering in detention. The militants who detained him stabbed his back and then sprinkled lemon salt on the wounds to coerce him into disclosing the names of people they alleged worked with the AANES. The militants resumed torturing Hammou when they discovered the names he gave them were fake.

Hussain says he will return to his village only if violations stop and UN entities and international organizations are allowed into the region. Notably, over the past six years, Türkiye has denied international rights groups and media outlets access to the area, hampering the documentation of violations and reporting on the reality of the situation.

Even though the controlling Syrian armed groups have, for years, made promises to restore security and stability in Afrin and call IDPs to return to their homes, many of the displaced locals, among them Muhammad, Hamida, and Hussain, believe these calls are only for political propaganda as they continue to be starkly contradicted by groups' actual practices.



About Beyti Project:

The project aims to document the violations of Housing, Land, and Property rights in the context of the Syrian conflict, especially in the areas that witnessed widespread forced displacement on a national, ethnic, religious, sectarian, or regional basis.

During the implementation of the project, Beyti is keen to coordinate and cooperate with Syrian local initiatives and relevant international organizations, in order to contribute to building the comprehensive Syrian narrative by collecting and documenting the violations committed by all parties and dealing with the victims on the basis of equality and non-discrimination.

In the early stages of the project, Beyti plans to issue a brief guide on property rights violations in Syria, in addition to stories of people who are forcibly displaced. Also, STJ aims to create a database capable of documenting and archiving the forms and interviews that are conducted in a secure manner that adheres to international standards for documentation so that they are analyzed and presented in the form of interactive reports and maps in the future.

Beyti Project welcomes all cooperation and coordination initiatives aimed at preserving evidence and seeking to achieve justice and accountability for all violations committed against Syrian property throughout Syria.

The values and vision of Beyti Project are consistent with those of STJ which seeks to achieve equal rights for all Syrians, documents human rights violations committed in Syria and against Syrians, and works to reach justice and change.



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