

**DEMOCRATIC SELF-ADMINISTRATION**

**THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE CANTON OF AFRIN**

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## **Encroachments by Turkish State on Nature and Agriculture in Afrin**

### **Deliberate and Malicious Burning of Homes, Fields and Forests**

#### **Seizure of Property by Force**

Prior to the Turkish invasion of Afrin, the area had 25,000 square km. of both natural and man-made Mediterranean forests and woods. In the past, this agricultural diversity in the fascinating natural beauty of Afrin plus the existence of some famous archaeological sites made the area an absorbing tourist attraction.

The forests of Afrin were the only green areas in the north of Syria spared by the destructive blazes of Syrian Inferno. In fact, as part and parcel of adhering to its strict ecological rules, the regional self-administration government had spared no efforts to protect the natural cover by outlawing deforestation and overgrazing.

Here, forests and woods have pines, oaks and wild olives. There are also qatlabs, terebinths, hawthorns and various shrubs.

When Turkey launched its perfidious aggression on Jan 20, 2018, the Turkish army targeted all vital utilities as well as forests. Ever since capturing the territory, the Turkish army and its affiliated armed groups have been conducting scorched earth policy, including a systematic destruction of forests and farms. Besides, agricultural resources of local Kurds are being confiscated and exploited for the benefit of new settlers, who are in fact the families of Islamist terrorists from Ghouta and other Syrian areas, by implementing various economic infringement policies.

These are few observed and documented encroachments on forests and farming lands:

- 1- On July 19, 2018 pro-Turkey armed groups set fire to Mount Kribel near Midan Akbas on the border with Turkey, north of Rajo.
- 2- On July 16, 2018, the armed groups burned pinewoods near the village of Qurt Qlaq, Sherran Township.
- 3- On July 15, 2018, they burned down pine groves on Mount Jerqa near Rajo. (Enclosed picture No1):
- 4- On 13 July, 2018, the armed groups burned more than 1000 olive trees belonging to locals from the village of Khoziana, Mabatly. When the locals tried to put out the fire, they were held back by former ISIS fighters of the so-called Jaish Al-Sharqiyya and, consequently, the fire spread to adjacent forests (enclosed photo No 2).
- 5- On 11 July, 2018, the armed groups set fire to a number of houses in the village of Sariya, Mabatly. As the rebels prevented people from extinguishing the fire, the fires extended to nearby forests (ENCLOSED PICTURES 3/4).
- 6- On 6 July, the Turkish army destroyed hundreds of olive trees near the village of Sewiya.
- 7- Under the supervision of Turkish MIT officers, armed groups burned down 2 hectares of forest trees in the Valley of Nashama/Tira (PICTURE NO5).
- 8- On 6 July, 2018, large areas of forests extending from the villages of Upper Hajjika and Lower Hajjika as far as to the villages of Quda, Darwish and Mosaka near Rajo. This area is known to contain the original wild olive species of Zaiti. (AN AUDIO RECORD IS ENCLOSED)

- 9- The armed groups set fire to an area containing 2500 olive and pomegranate trees, plus vineyards in agrarian lands owned by locals from the village of Adama, Rajo, along the highway to Midan Akbaz. These lands belong to the following people: Mohammad Osman Salem with 1000 trees; Rajab Osman Salem with 100 trees; Suleiman Mohammad with 100 trees; Walid Mohammad Mohammad 100 trees; Mohammad Hasan Ismail with 100 trees; Yahya Rashid Mostafa, 300 trees. Moreover, 1500 pomegranate trees and 300 grape vines possessed by Mohammad Sheikh Bakir Dada.
- 10-On 6 July , 2018 the Turkish army set fire to a 4 kilometer long strip of farming lands to the west of the village of Atman, Rajo. Oak and pine trees also got destroyed in the fire (PICTURE NO 6).
- 11-On 30 May, 2018, building a training camp for the rebels, the Turkish army destroyed some 500 olive trees belonging to three local farmers (Mohammad Ali Omar from Haj Jamal village, Mehiddin Bladino and Ahmad Salih from Atmana village, Rajo. Also, 400 hundred meters of plastic water pipes got burned. When the villagers lodged a complaints to Turkish officers, they received this response from one of the officers: “Since we have taken Afrin by force, do you think it is rational for us to take your permission to seize your land and pluck out your trees?” In the village of Blilko, the Turkish army cut off forest trees in order to build an air field for to helicopters.
- 12-On 8 June, 2018 the Turkish army burned down large areas of crops belonging to the family of Areffo from Qibbar with 3 hectares; the family of Nassan with 4 hectares; the family of Zakaria Sheikh Hamzeh from the village of Darger. Also 3 hectares of crops were burned down at the northern entrance of Afrin.
- 13-On 8 June, 2018, armed factions set fire to farms planted with olive and barley to the north of Birj Qas village in Sherawa .
- 14- Burning down of wheat and barley fields near the villages of Basileh and Benneh on the second day of Eid-al-fitre (ENCLOSED PICTURES 7/8 )
- 15-On 29 June, 2018 Ahrar al-sharqiya bands set ablaze the whole village of Banika, Rajo. When the locals tried to put out the fire, the rebels fired at them, and, as a result, the fire extended to nearby forest trees. (PICTURE NO 9)
- 16- On June 22, 23 armed groups burned down the pine forests to the east of Lake Midanki as well as pines on the sole island inside the Lake (ENCLOSED PICTURE 10/11)

**P. N. The information and sites can be verified and certified through satellite images. Ironically these criminal acts of arson took place just few days after World’s Environment Day on 5 May .**

In addition to these direct transgressions on the environment, farms and people – Turkey and violent armed groups steal and seize machines and crops owned by locals. Today, it is frequent in Afrin that armed groups would storm houses to steal cars, combine harvesters, transport trucks, tractors and other vehicles. In many cases, the owner pay nearly half the real price of his vehicle to the armed gangs to retrieve his machine. This is documented by human rights organizations.

#### **Looting of This Year’s Wheat Crops by Turkish Altunsa**

All reports coming from Afrin confirm that the Turkish state has plundered the wheat crop of this year. This is tantamount to a grave war crime. The Turkish Altunsa company introduced 25 modern combine harvester into Afrin. Local farmers had to sell their wheat to Altunsa, exclusively, at a cheap price of one Turkish lira for a kilo, or what is equivalent to 90 Syrian pounds. The Turkish company also used the rebels to discount 20 percent of the overall value of their product to pay for hiring harvesters and workers, plus 7 percent tax imposed by the rebels themselves. According to estimates by the former Board of Agriculture in Afrin, the total production of wheat in Afrin was due to surpass 20 thousand tons this year. Besides, many thousand hectares of grain fields were confiscated by the armed groups under the pretext that the owners hadn’t acquired licenses or they were displaced outside the area. Moreover, stealing genetically –modified species of Syrian wheat is a grave violation of international law.

### **A systematic Economic policy of Annihilation**

Afrin's farmers face grave threats in addition to their already deteriorated conditions as traders loyal to armed groups control the markets. Those traders are the sole wholesale buyers and sellers of agricultural products produced by farmers. Local sources say farmers have to get special permission notes to transport their products from their fields and villages to local markets. These transport declarations are issued by local councils appointed by Turkish army for what is equivalent to 120 USD each. Worst of all, different armed groups controlling different areas do not often recognize these permits, demanding further taxes on transportation. Farmers say that prices of farming products are not proportionate with the costs, and, thereupon, their losses are costly. This table shows differences of prices currently tagged on the same agricultural products in Afrin versus Aleppo under the control of Syrian government.

<b>Products</b>	<b>Prices in Afrin</b>	<b>Prices in Aleppo</b>
garlic	25 Syrian pounds	75 Syrian Pounds
green chicken peas	25 Syrian Pounds	100 Syrian Pounds
cherries	50 Syrian Pounds	700 Syrian Pounds
Plums	40 Syrian Pounds	500 Syrian Pounds
apricot	80 Syrian Pounds	500 Syrian Pounds
apple	120 Syrian Pounds	400 Syrian Pounds
wheat	90 Syrian Pounds	175 Syrian Pounds

These huge differences in prices show how the Turkish state is trying to impoverish the locals in Afrin, who mostly depend on farming to make a living. This policy is intended to allow the new settlers to control everything by seizing the properties of the majority of locals who are now displaced and those who could not leave, would find themselves forced in the end to sell their lands to the settlers. There have been lot of cases under which locals, under threats to their life, were obliged to lease their lands to the families of armed groups for insignificant amounts of money. For example, in the past 300,000 Syrian pounds were paid for leasing one hectare of irrigated land but today settlers get it for less than 30,000.

#### **Seizure of Land or Forced leasing**

The Turkish state and the rebels have also issued new laws forcing any relative to the displaced people to pay 1500 Syrian pounds for each olive tree if they want to cultivate the groves belonging to their displaced relatives ( AN AUDIO RECORDING IS ENCLOSED )

#### **Grave violations of Human Rights are now committed in Afrin and the Turkish State should be held Accountable According to the International Law**

The aforementioned transgressions in Afrin are just a drop in the bucket. These broad daylight encroachments on nature and people by the Turkish state and its proxies should not go unpunished according to the basic conventions of international law of Rome, 1998; which says that "any extensive, long-standing severe damage to environment is a war crime violating the principle of proportion". Other international laws forbid the destruction of farming lands and drinking water facilities in deliberate attempt to cause severe harm to civilians. The international law also grants environment a civilian status, preventing any encroachment on it in two different aspects: First, under its general laws, and secondly, under some special supplementary laws.

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