

**Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in
Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad after 2019**

A Research Report



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Cover Photo: Pro-Turkish Syrian fighters gather near the Turkish village of Akinci along the border with Syria on October 11, 2019, as they prepare to take part in the Turkish-led assault on north-eastern Syria. (Photo by Bakr ALKASEM/AFP)

مقاتلون سوريون موالون لتركيا يتجمعون بالقرب من قرية أكينجي التركية قرب الحدود مع سوريا بتاريخ ١١ تشرين الأول ٢٠١٩، بينما يستعدون للمشاركة في الهجوم الذي تقوده تركيا على شمال شرق سوريا. (تصوير بكر القاسم / وكالة فرانس برس)

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Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad after 2019

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Our village’s mukhtar, Said Mustafa Salman, died after we fled. We tried to bury him in the village’s cemetery. To this end, we communicated with the locals in the nearby Madbaa village. They asked the SNA to allow us to bury him in the village. However, the army told them that [we] no longer have a village to demand to bury [our] dead there. Therefore, we buried him in the cemetery in Tal l’rfan near the al-Khaznawi Institute. We placed his body in a coffin so we could move it to our village when we returned there.

”

Witness displaced from Daoudia village in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê

1. Executive Summary:

On 9 October 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the start of the military operation code-named "Peace Spring". The incursion targeted and led to the Turkish military and Türkiye-backed armed groups of the Syrian National Army's (SNA) complete control over the strip in north-east Syria, encompassing Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad.¹ Grave human rights violations accompanied the operation, and numerous others occurred over the years following active hostilities—especially breaches of the local population's property rights. The violations are corroborated by a total of 75 in-person interviews with internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the two areas. Among the interviewees are 39 men and 36 women who now live across al-Hasakah province or in the Tel Samen IDP Camp in Raqqa.

This research report sheds light on the violations of housing, land, and property (HLP) rights perpetrated by the Turkish military and the SNA-affiliated armed groups in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad areas, which they have predominated since the incursion. Notably, the testimonies collected for this report revealed that key patterns underpinned the abuses perpetrated against the two areas' local communities. These were the seizure of locals' homes and shops; housing strangers in seized homes; unlawful destruction of locals' properties; appropriation of agricultural lands, bulldozing or cutting off the trees they contained; and transformation of appropriated properties and groves into military posts. The Turkish military did not only bear witness to these violations but also took part in committing them. Furthermore, the testimonies also unveiled patterns of violations that ran in parallel to HLP abuses, including looting seized homes' furniture, selling, burning down, or damaging household items; and destroying title deeds and other property-related documents. Other violations transpired, including the humiliation, arrest, and torture of locals who dared to protest the seizure of their properties, and also denying locals access to their hometowns, not even to bury their dead.

¹ "Three Years after Operation 'Peace Spring': No Stability East of the Euphrates" (in Arabic), *The New Arab*, 10 October 2022 (last accessed: 15 August 2023).

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%AB%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AB%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%22%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%22-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%81%D9%82%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA>

Notably, these patterns mirror those recorded in the Afrin region that accompanied Operation Olive Branch, which PEL–Civil Waves documented in a previous report titled “[Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in Afrin after 2018](#)”.

The testimonies’ analysis shows that the systematic and large-scale violations mainly aimed at not only amassing massive profits for the SNA fighters involved in looting but also forcing the locals to flee their areas and leave their homes to the armed groups, who later settled in IDP families from elsewhere in Syria in the properties they seized. This has ultimately resulted in vast demographic changes, the primary victims of which were Kurdish citizens, both men and women, who were accused of affiliation with the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). The armed groups used this alleged affiliation as a pretext to confiscate the properties of locals.

Witnesses interviewed for this report managed to identify the armed groups involved in **148** out of **164** property violations, leaving **16** cases unaccounted for. Additionally, information compiled and analysed by PEL-Civil Waves’ team indicates that the property violations in the report’s target area—the Peace Spring strip—were perpetrated by the SNA or the Turkish military directly. Aggregated by the number of violations committed, the groups involved were:

- The **al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division** stood behind the larger number of violations, being involved in **52** abuses;
- The **Turkish military** perpetrated **32** abuses;
- The **Sultan Murad Division** perpetrated **18** abuses;
- The **Mu'tasim Division** perpetrated **13** abuses;
- The **Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Free Men of the East** perpetrated **12** abuses;
- The **SNA** perpetrated **8** abuses;
- The **Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya** perpetrated **4** abuses;
- The **al-Mawali Brigade** perpetrated **4** abuses;
- The al-Qadisiyah Brigade, the Northern Hawks Brigade, the Shaitat Brigade, and the Euphrates Shield Brigade perpetrated **one** property seizure each.

Notably, one witness said he was uncertain about the fate of his shop in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, adding that locals in the city have been saying that the Local Council, established by the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), has been appropriating and renting out shops of forcibly displaced owners. Additionally,

based on the testimonies, the Turkish military has been directly involved in transforming numerous civilian properties into military posts and zones. Furthermore, the Turkish military also destroyed and seized houses and groves in **24** out of **33** documented cases. Of these cases, **19** occurred in Tal Abyad, and another **19** happened in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city.

Moreover, the testimonies show the unwillingness of the victims to reclaim their seized properties, either for fear of retaliation or for a lack of trust in the institutions run by the de facto authorities, which also remains the primary reason for their decision not to return to their original places of residence now that five years have passed since the invasion and even after a Restitution Committee was founded. Notably, the committee was later absolved, allegedly because it was no longer needed.



Infographic 1- A map of the areas in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad where violations concentrated based on inputs from the interviewed witnesses.

Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad After 2019

Perpetrators Involved in the Violations



Based on interviews with 75 locals
 39 men
 36 women

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Infographic 2- Perpetrators involved in the documented violations as identified by the interviewed witnesses.

2. Report Methodology:

This research report builds on 75 in-person interviews conducted by PEL-Civil Waves' team of field researchers in north-eastern Syria between June 2022 and August 2023. The interviewees included 48 women and men from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and 27 women and men from Tal Abyad, all displaced by the hostilities that accompanied the Türkiye-led Operation Peace Spring. The report seeks to disclose the status of HLP rights violations in the two areas perpetrated by personnel of the Turkish military and fighters of the SNA, which operates under the SIG's mantle.

The verbal statements initially taken from the interviewees were later transcribed into existing forms by PEL-Civil Waves' administrative and legal teams. The statements were then supplemented by the witnesses/victims' title deeds and other property-related documents, as well as photos and videos of a few of the seized properties, which are all added to the forms. Another layer of verification was carried out, as the team used Google Maps to identify the targeted properties and asked the victims to hand-draw sketches of the houses usurped. In addition to data from the interviewees, the report references open-source materials on the violations perpetrated in the Türkiye-occupied areas. Such references included, primarily, the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI). Notably, several of the witnesses/victims' statements largely matched the COI's documentation.

For further accuracy, during the interviews, the field researchers requested that victims describe in detail the sources on which they relied for information and updates on their properties after they lost access to their hometowns. Moreover, a consultation committee of victims of HLP rights abuses in the wake of Operation Peace Spring participated in the witness-reach-out process for the interviews included in this report. The committee also helped in outlining the report and was later sent a copy of its findings, based on which they contributed several of the recommendations listed at the end.

Notably, PEL-Civil Waves opted to withhold the identities of the interviewees and other information that might disrupt their anonymity. To guarantee their safety, the same measure was applied even to witnesses who approved disclosing their real names in the report, and pseudonyms were marked with an (*). Furthermore, PEL-Civil Waves obtained the informed consent of most of the interviewees, which

warrants sharing their statements in all the organization's advocacy and justice-aimed activities involving national and international courts, commissions of inquiry, and rights organizations. To this end, the witnesses signed the consent forms attached to the interview forms.

3. Patterns of HLP Rights Violations after Operation Peace Spring:

The analysis of the 75 testimonies provided by IDPs from the two targeted areas demonstrates that the reported HLP rights violations were neither random, arbitrary nor, as some parties allege, individual wrongdoings. The analysis further indicates that these violations were systematic and of a large scale, geared towards coercing the locals into fleeing their areas; abandoning their properties; and relinquishing any thoughts of returning to their residences in the future, in addition to the involved perpetrators' intention to loot the contents of the forsaken real estate. Building on the analysis, PEL-Civil Waves deduced three key patterns of violations committed in the area and detected various other types of abuses committed in tandem with property rights violations. All three patterns had discriminatory undertones; some were ethnically motivated, while others had political or ideological triggers and are delineated as follows:

■ A. Confiscation of Homes, Shops, and Housing Non-Owners

Based on the interviews, property seizures, including those of homes and shops, remain the most rampant pattern of violations. Under this pattern, PEL-Civil Waves recorded **54** house and **27** shop confiscations out of the **108** property seizures reported. All interviewees stressed that the expropriations were arbitrary and had no military justifications.

During an August 2023 interview, Hanan Zakaraya*, a mother of seven who now lives in the informal Washokani IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city, narrated that al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division looted all the contents of her house in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and spray-painted number two in red on its exterior wall. She said numbers were similarly spray-painted on the facades of her in-laws' house and the homes of the villagers who escaped the hostilities, adding that the Division "informed the village's residents that every numbered home has become their property." Hanan's statement intersects to a large extent with the testimony provided by Khalid al-Issa*, particularly the spraypainted phrases announcing that marked properties now belong to a so-and-so armed group. During an August 2023 interview, al-Issa,

hailing from Ali Bajiyeh village, administratively affiliated with Tal Abya city city, told PEI-Civil Waves: “I fled the village fearing the Turkish shelling. A week later, fighters from Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Free Men of the East spray-painted ‘reserved for Ahrar al-Sharqiya’ on my house’s exterior wall. Then, three individuals from the same armed group resided in the house. Before they evacuated, they looted the house’s contents and two motorcycles. Even after these people left, the house remained under their control. I learned about this from family members and neighbors who live there. I prefer not to disclose their names.” In the same context, during a July 2022 interview, Lila al-Suleiman*, from al-Manajir town, administratively affiliated with Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, narrated: “Both my brother’s and my house were seized by gunmen, who likely belong to the SNS’s al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division because it is the armed group in control of the area. The officer in charge of these fighters told the town’s people that this house now belongs to him.”

Ahmad Muwafaq* gave PEI-Civil Waves a matching account. Hailing from Abu Kalah village, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, and a father of five, he said that the house where he lived was seized by the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, who later settled an Iraqi family there without his consent. He added: “An Iraqi family was placed in my home after it was looted. The family is civilian, and none of its members are fighters. No one can live in a house in the area without approval from the armed group in control of the neighborhood. Our street has been taken over by the al-Mawali Tribe, which is affiliated with the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. Therefore, I can say, with utmost certainty, that it was the Division that looted the contents of my house before it brought in the Iraqi family.”



Image 1-The house of witness Ahmad Muwafaq, in Abu Kalah village-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, satellite-geolocated based on his inputs during the interview.

Notably, house seizures were not always carried out to shelter civilian families. Several of the property confiscations documented were conducted to house the families of fighters from the groups controlling the area. Shivan Yousef*, a lawyer displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, who currently lives in the al-Mufti neighbourhood in al-Hasakah, told PEL-Civil Waves that his house was seized and a family from Deir ez-Zor is residing in it. Several of that family's males are members of an armed group, whom Shivan's sources of information failed to identify. However, Shivan confirmed that the Mu'tasim Division is the group dominating his neighbourhood. He said: "I used to live in the eastern neighborhood of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. On 9 October 2019, my family and I fled to Farhiyah Khaljan

village, where my parents reside. It is located nearly 35 km away from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city. While there, I reached out to my elderly neighbor and asked her to visit my house and examine its status. She told me that she went to the house and that a family from Deir ez-Zor was staying there. The family hails from Al-Uqaydat tribe, and several of its members are recruits of the Free Army.” The witness added: “I am also in touch with an Arab friend who remains in the city. He intended to visit the house twice but could not, fearing the armed group controlling the neighborhood. The group is the Mu'tasim Division. He told me that a checkpoint has been set up about 10 meters south of my house and that the checkpoint's personnel live in my neighbor's house.”

During an August 2023 interview, witness Abdullah Muhammad*, a local and a resident of Tlail al-Dele' village said that his grove in the village, where he had built a house and had 70 olive trees, was seized and transformed into a Turkish military post. The witness added that his nearly 500 m² house, located in Tal Abyad city, "particularly in Suluk district, was appropriated by an FSA commander, but I remain uncertain as to who he is exactly. He resides there with his family and siblings since the house extends over about 500 m². Even though my stepmother and two of my brothers stayed in the district, they failed to reclaim the house. Additionally, no law exists that can oblige those occupiers to leave the house.”

During a January 2023 interview, Ali Muhsen*, originally from Ad-Darbasiyah district, said several armed groups lived in his 220 m² house in the Zorava neighbourhood in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city after he fled the city. He added: “I called my neighbor, who rented a house in our street in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê before we were displaced. He is an Arab from Homs. He told me that, four months after we escaped, the contents of my house were all looted. After he relocated from our street, I started contacting other neighbors. They are Kurdish and told me a family from Idlib province had settled in the house. Then, fighters from the Mu'tasim Division transformed my home into a warehouse, where they stored the items they looted. The neighbors later informed me that the family of a fighter from the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, who is from Deir ez-Zor, was now living there.”

This statement matched a case cited in the COI's report published on 14 August 2020. The COI reported that “[[l]ooted household items were transported and sold through a coordinated process, which may indicate a premeditated policy

implemented by several brigades [. . .]. In one such case in March, a returnee to Tel al-Arisha village found his house looted, including its windows, doors and generators, which had also happened to numerous other houses on the same street. A senior member of Division 24 (the Sultan Murad Brigade) of the Syrian National Army sold back to him his own household goods from a warehouse that was being used as a storage point for looted goods. He fled immediately thereafter.”²

For his part, witness Khalid al-Kurdi*, a local car painter displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city who now lives in the al-Mufti neighbourhood in al-Hasakah, said that his house was seized by a fighter who resides there with his family. He added that his rented auto paint shop was also expropriated and leased by the armed group in control of the area to a member of the Mu'tasim Division. He narrated:

“I kept in touch with an Arab friend. Two months after we fled the area, he told me that my house and my shop in the industrial zone were both looted. Later, he informed me that he visited our street and passed by my house, whose door was open. He said he saw a gunman in camo clothing and his family in my house. He also saw that the exterior wall of the stockroom I had at home was destroyed. Additionally, he informed me that my shop was rented out to another person by the Mu'tasim Division, who received the rent in Turkish Lira.”

Witness Maryam Hamoud* grappled with a similar situation. Based in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp, she said that the contents of her house, located in the al-Hawarneh neighbourhood, were looted nearly ten days after she and her family escaped hostilities during Operation Peace Spring. She said a family from Idlib province started living in the house two months after she was displaced. She narrated:

“I obtained this information from an Arab neighbor who remained in the city. Over a call, he told me that our house was looted ten days after we escaped. He also said he approached the gunmen, who had red straps on their shoulders, and asked them, ‘Why would you take the house’s items; its owners are a poor family?’ One of the fighters slapped him and responded, ‘It is none of your business, and if you

² For additional information, see: Paragraph 50 of the Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 14 August 2020, available from: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F45%2F31&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>.

stay here, I will kill you!’ Two months after we fled, a neighbor told me she went from al-Hasakah to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city to check on her house. She also visited our street and told me she saw fuel barrels and two men sitting in front of my house. My [Arab] neighbors informed her that a family from Idlib was living in my house. However, I was not told whether this family was affiliated with an armed group. My neighbor spent a few days in the city and returned to al-Hasakah. She resides in the same camp where I am staying.”

Based on the testimonies, it can be deduced that property seizures targeted the Kurdish community, for the majority of the witnesses/victims gained information about their properties from Arab neighbours who remained in the region. Notably, this intersects with COI’s documentation across several reports, including the one published on 14 August 2020. The COI reported that “[s]imilarly to in Afrin, the civilian properties of Kurdish owners in the Ra’s al-Ayn region who had fled battles during Operation Peace Spring⁵² in October 2019 were also appropriated by Syrian National Army forces. Members of Division 22 (the Hamza Brigade) of the Syrian National Army engaged in widespread and organized looting and property appropriation in Ra’s al-Ayn, including by marking house walls with the names of individual brigades. Civilians narrated consistent accounts to the Commission conveying their fears about remaining and their inability to return to their homes, which had been looted and occupied by the brigades or their families in the immediate aftermath of hostilities. On two occasions, civilians recalled being instructed not to return by Syrian National Army commanders and fighters”.³

■ **B. Illegal Destruction and Militarization of Locals’ Properties**

The HLP rights violations recorded were not limited to civilian property seizures and looting, nor to using some properties to house non-owners. Other properties were destroyed or partially damaged, while others were sabotaged without any military necessities that warranted such abuses. Additionally, a different set of properties was turned into military stations and posts without the owners’ consent. Several of these violations were directly perpetrated by the Turkish military, which was

³ For additional information, see: Paragraph 49 of the Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 14 August 2020, available from: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F45%2F31&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>.

involved in the destruction of **56** properties, **33** of which were transformed into military headquarters.

One victim of these abuses is witness Khalid al-Hamdan*, who hails from al-Manakh village, administratively affiliated with Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, and now resides in Washokani IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city. The contents of both his shop and canteen, called *Muntazah al-Asdikaa al-Rifi*, were looted. Furthermore, both his house and those of his brothers were partially damaged. When he tried to return to his home three months after he fled the area, he was denied access, allegedly because his house was located within the confrontation zone and is now a military post. He narrated:

“The first time I returned to the area, I saw that all my café’s contents were looted. The flatscreen was also shot and shattered. My house was thoroughly searched. Additionally, the goods in the shop, which amounted to 6,000 USD, were looted. I attempted to return three months later. However, I was prevented from entering the area because the house was part of the frontline and a military post. I told the people there that my mother was old and wanted a photo of the house. They took my contacts. Indeed, a while later, a fighter sent me a photo, which showed the damage that befell parts of my house and the houses of my siblings.” He added: “The SNA’s Peace Spring channel on YouTube uploaded footage of military activities in our village. In the video, gunmen appeared standing across from my house and cafeteria; they belong to the SNA’s al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. The name of the armed group is displayed on their vehicles. At their checkpoints, they also flew the groups’ banner next to the revolution’s flag.”



Image 2- The house of witness Khalid al-Hamdan, in al-Manakh village-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê satellite-geolocated based on his inputs during the interview.

During a December 2022 interview, Sawsan al-Muwafaq*, a local displaced from a village in the eastern part of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city who now lives in Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city, said that her entire village was appropriated and turned into a military zone. She added that her house was partially damaged and its contents looted, along with farming equipment. She narrated: “Our house and groves were seized. The entire village was transformed into a military zone, and no one was allowed entry into the area. The armed group predominating in

our area is the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, and the people are saying that its fighters perpetrated the looting and the thefts. The fighters are preventing locals from returning to the area, claiming it is a military zone. There are YouTube videos on SNA-affiliated websites that capture their entry to the village in military outfits and the name al-Hamzat Division on their flags.”



Image 3- The house of witness Sawsan al-Muwafaq in al-Faisaliyah village-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê satellite-geolocated based on her inputs during the interview.

Notably, some properties are seized only temporarily and are often evacuated after they are no longer useful or profitable. According to witness Shadi al-Mahmoud*, a local and a resident of Khirbet al-Souda village, administratively affiliated with Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, interviewed in July 2022, all the village’s houses were confiscated and no locals were allowed in allegedly because the village is a military zone. This happened over the first seven months after Operation Peace Spring. He narrated:

“Over the first seven months, houses across the village were seized, and it was declared a military operations area. No one was allowed access to the village until May 2020. My house was destroyed, and its contents were looted. My house is made of clay bricks, and like all clay houses, it requires yearly renovations. It has been three years since I last renovated my house because I cannot access it; it lies there almost destroyed and all gone due to the rain, especially since they stole the zinc roofing that protected it from the rain. Had they not looted the roof installations, the house would have remained restorable, but they did steal them. My house is no longer repairable. There are images of my house that I can share with you.”

According to the testimonies, the destruction of some properties appears to have been arbitrary on some occasions; on others, however, it was done in retaliation or at the whims of the perpetrators. During a December 2023 interview, witness Sarah al-Taweel*, who now lives in Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city with her husband and four children, said that her house was destroyed and bulldozed because it blocked the view of a commander of one of al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division’s sub-groups. She narrated: “When my father and mother visited the village, it was empty except for fighters. The fighters told them the village was a military zone, and they could not remain there, identifying themselves as [fighters] from the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. When my mother asked them, 'Why would they bulldoze the house and destroy it this way?' They said, 'Our house was blocking the view of their commander’s house, [which was also confiscated], and so they had to clear it away.' They wore SNA military outfits, carried arms, and had the name al-Hazmat written on their vehicles. They were over 20 in number.”

Within this context, during a December 2022 interview, Shurouq Mustafa*, a resident of al-Souda village on the Tal Tamer-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê road, who now resides in Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city, said she cannot return to her house because it was partially damaged, rendered roofless, and is inhabitable. She added: “All my house’s contents were looted, including the windows and doors. It was seized by the Sultan Murad Division for six months and then by the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat division for another six months. They then left my house and the village. However, I still cannot go back there because my house no longer has a roof and a large part of it, [two rooms], was destroyed. Additionally, it contains no

furniture and is not fit to live in. It needs restoration, which I cannot afford. I am also concerned that my husband might get arrested because the area is unsafe.”

For her part, during a January 2023 interview, witness Su’ad al-Khalid*, a former resident of the Zaradasht neighbourhood in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, who now lives in Serê Kaniyê IDP camp, said that the Turkish shelling destroyed her shop and the exterior wall of her house. She added: “From a neighbour I keep in touch with, I learned that the house and the small shop were looted. Additionally, the shop and the exterior wall of my house were destroyed, and the walls of the rooms sustained cracks due to a Turkish airstrike on the *Sakan al-Dubatt* (Officers’ Housing Block), which is [located behind the Civil Registry], near my house and is used for housing families of the martyrs of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).”

Having suffered similar violations, in an October 2023 interview, Shadiya Abdulrhman*, a local of the al-Arisha village on the Tal Tamer-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê road, who now lives in Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city, said that one of her houses was destroyed and another was burned down. She narrated: “As the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division randomly bombarded the city before it entered the area, several mortar shells landed in my house and destroyed it. This house is located nearly 20 meters away from the second property.” About the looting and subsequent burning of her second house, located in the same village, she said: “The al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division looted all my second house’s contents. Among the items stolen were about 4000 USD and a nearly 10-gram piece of golden jewellery. As they entered the village’s homes and searched them, they randomly shot at the properties, especially at locked doors. There was a fuel barrel in our house’s storage room. Most likely, the bullets hit the barrel, setting the storage and the house aflame. I believe this is the most plausible explanation behind the house’s burning. They also seized our plot of land and confiscated two Peter-typed motors.”

During an interview on 28 January 2023, conducted inside her tent at Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city, witness Samiya al-Muhammad* described the terror that gripped her and her daughter when the Turkish incursion began. She said: “On 9 October 2019, I was home with my daughter. Back then, we had no clue what was awaiting us or the area. I asked my daughter to turn on the TV. My daughter read the breaking news ticker on *al-Arabiya al-Hadath* and screamed, ‘The Turkish forces started shelling Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city.’ A few minutes later, we heard

a loud explosion. The house shook, and the windows shattered. We hurried out of the house and left for al-Hasakah the next day.” As for her house, the witness said it was destroyed and transformed into a Turkish military post. She narrated that: “A Turkish warplane bombed my house, located at the hill in al-Mishrafah village, administratively affiliated with Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, which expands over an area of 500 m², including the surrounding plot of land. Later, my house and nearby homes were turned into a Turkish military base.”



Image (4)-The house of witness Samiyah al-Muhammad, in Tal’et Mishrafah village-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê satellite-geolocated based on her inputs during the interview.

In a similar account, during a June 2023 interview, witness Khalil al-Saleh*, who now resides in Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city, said: “We had an

agricultural site in Khirbat al-Banat village. All objects within the location were looted. Also, ten dunums of the site, including the trees, were bulldozed by the Turkish military. The Turkish military turned the facility into a military post and established a dirt mound around it.”



Image (5)-The property of witness Khalil al-Saleh, in Khirbat al-Banat village-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê satellite-geolocated based on his inputs during the interview.

During an interview on 7 August 2023, witness Sami al-Muhammad*, a local and resident of Sharkrak village, administratively affiliated with Tal Abyad city, said he had two houses, both of which were bulldozed. Additionally, a piece of land he owned was seized and was turned into a Turkish military base along with other properties across the village. He narrated: “Nearly six months after we fled, the two houses were destroyed and cleared away, along with numerous other houses

across the village—almost 80 of them. They also confiscated my agricultural land and turned it into a Turkish military base. They used the rubble of the destroyed houses to establish mounds around the base. Both the Turkish military and the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division are involved in this violation.”

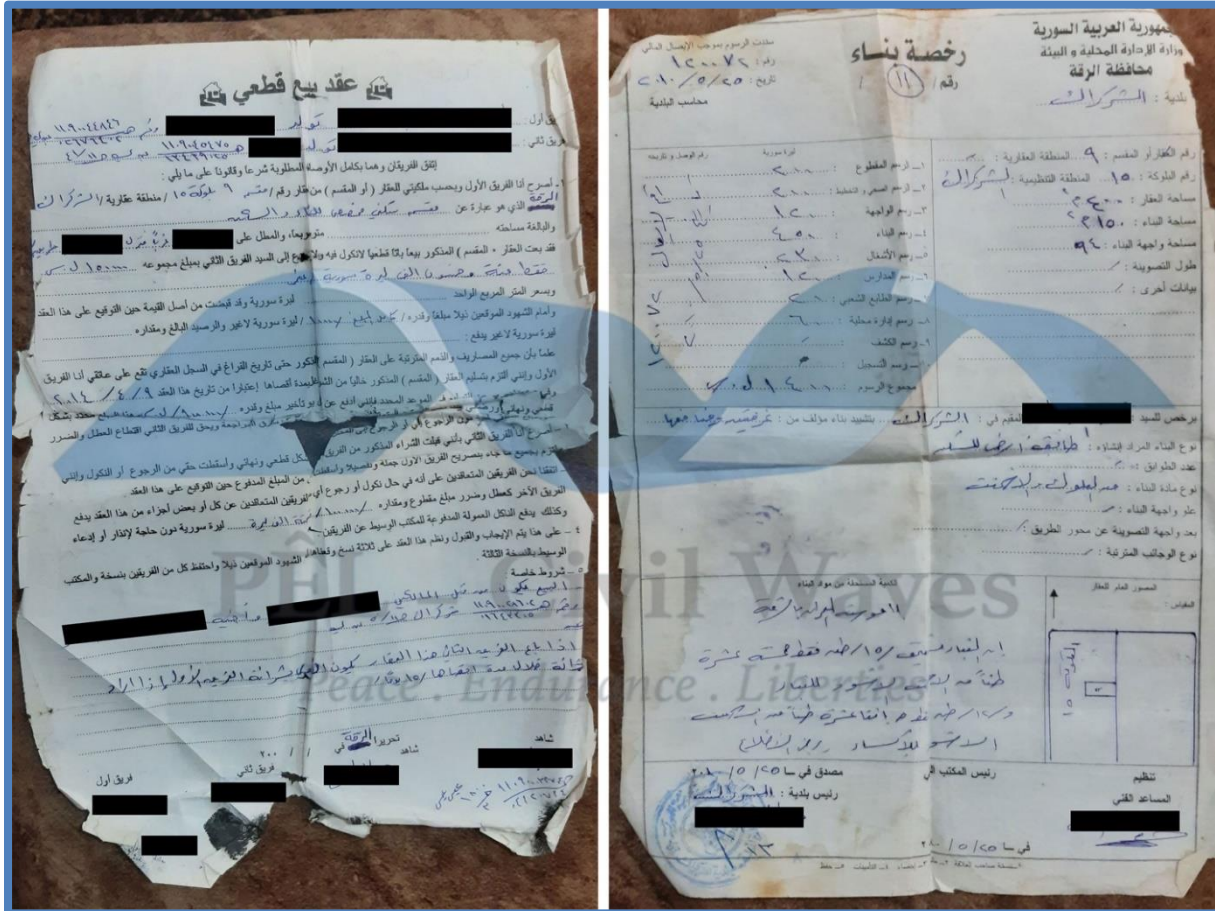


Image (6)-Construction license and sales contract, attesting to properties in Sharkrak village-Tal Abyad city, owned by witness Sami al-Muhammad.

The statements made by witness Karim al-Said* during an August 2023 interview conducted in Tel Samen IDP Camp in Raqqa city matched, to a great extent, witness Sami al-Muhammad’s account. His house was bulldozed, and his piece of land was transformed into a Turkish military base. The confiscations and the repurposing of involved properties for military uses were both corroborated by witness Marwa Mahmoud* during an August 2023 interview. A local and resident of the Sharkrak village, Marwa said that her family’s house was bulldozed; their piece of land was seized; and the village and all its properties were turned into a Turkish military base.



Image (7)- The house and piece of land belonging to witness Marwa Mahmoud, in Sharkrak village–Tal Abyad satellite-geolocated based on her inputs during the interview.

■ **C. Repursuing of Confiscated Groves for Military Uses**

The property violations documented were not confined to the illegal seizure of civilian homes and the use of these homes to house non-owners. In addition to these abuses, as well as the destruction or sabotage of houses, the targeted area also witnessed large-scale confiscations of groves owned by locals and, at times,

the cutting off or bulldozing of trees for timber trade or heating during the winter. The abuses recorded included **27** seizures of agricultural pieces of land and the destruction of **16** others.

The above-cited witness, Lila al-Suleiman*, said that her agricultural land and a small orchard cultivated with olive and pomegranate trees were seized, in addition to the machinery used for irrigating the groves. She said: “The al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, which dominates our area, seized my small olive orchard, which was surrounded on all areas, for about 700 m, with pomegranate trees. The same armed group also expropriated a 35-dunum piece of land, 20 of which were rainfed, while the remaining 15 were irrigated, in addition to two shops.”

Witness Shadi al-Mahmoud*, also cited above, said that gunmen had seized his house and others owned by the villagers. They looted the contents of these houses and also cut off the 12 trees in his house and used them for heating.

Having struggled with identical property abuses, during a July 2022 interview, witness Ritaj al-Khalid*, a local of Khirbat Qaraj village, administratively affiliated with Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, who now lives in Washokani IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city, narrated: “Our 15-dunum piece of land was seized, along with the storage house, the cow and sheep barn, and country house, the contents of which were all looted. The house was damaged, and trees surrounding it were cut down.” Elaborating on the situation, she added: “I remain unsure which armed group committed all these violations. However, several people who live near our village said that they saw individuals in SNA military outfits looting the village and loading the stolen items onto cars. They were armed. Many others said that the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division controls our village. When I tried to return to my home a month after my husband and I fled, a checkpoint established to the north on the way to our village stopped us. I read the phrase ‘Omar ibn al-Khattab Brigade’ on a wall near the checkpoint.”

During a January 2023 interview conducted in Tal Hajar neighbourhood in al-Hasakah city, witness Abdurahman Hammou*, a farmer from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, said that all his properties in al-Aziziyah village were seized, including houses, warehouses, and agricultural facilities. All the contents of these properties were also looted. He narrated: “The contents of my houses and depots were looted. The same happened to the locals’ houses across the village. The houses were all

destroyed, including mine, which was built of clay bricks, except for my second house and those owned by my brother, cousin, and neighbour, which were built of cement and concrete bricks. They turned the entire area of about 89 dunums into a Turkish military base. They also uprooted trees using bulldozers, dug a 4-meter ditch, and erected dirt mounds around the military base. As for the agricultural facility I had on a 250-dunum piece of land, 75 of which were cultivated with cotton, its rooms were destroyed; its entire contents were looted; and its trees were uprooted.”



Image (8)- The house belonging to witness Abdurahman Hammou, in al-Aziziyah village-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city satellite-geolocated based on his inputs during the interview.

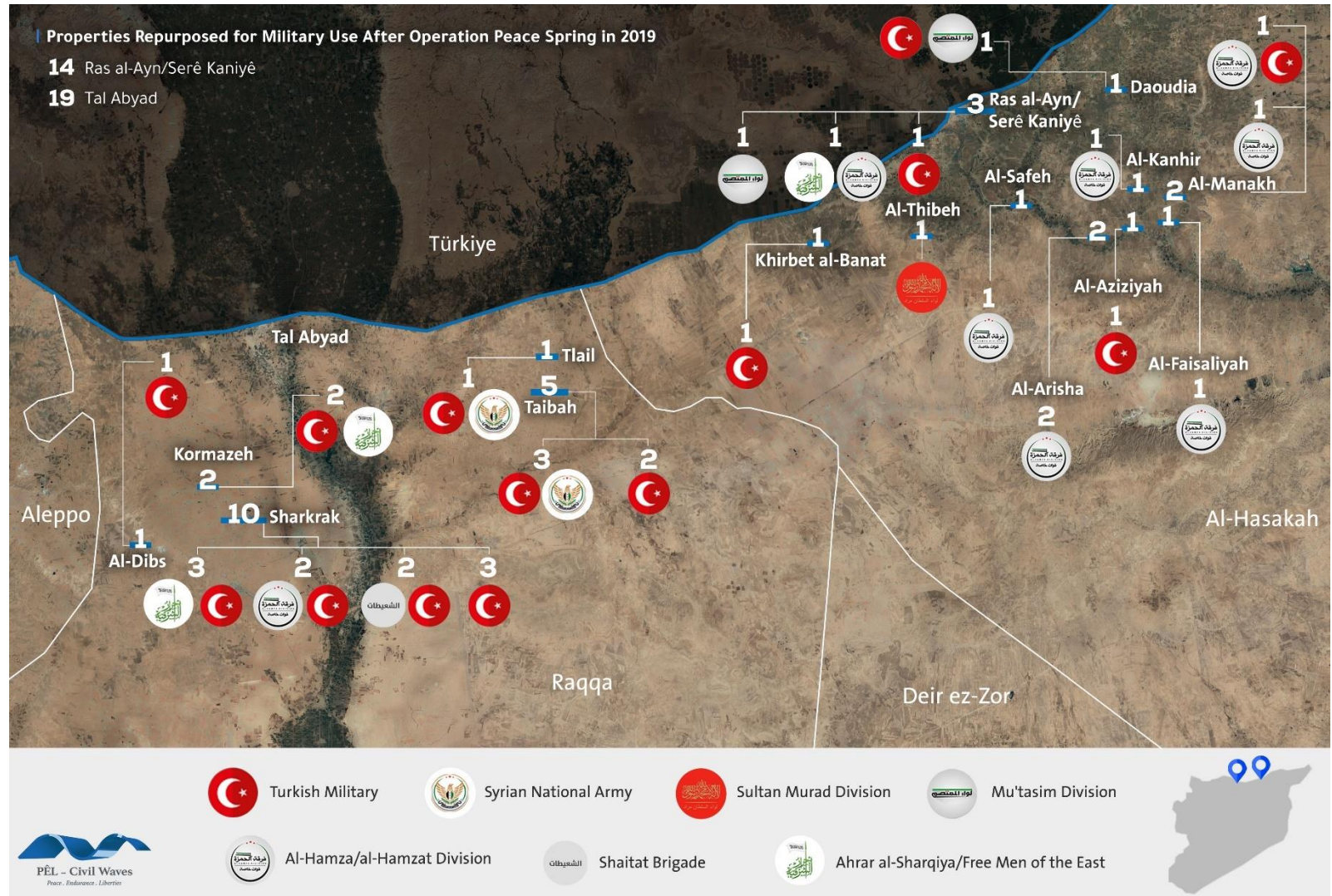
Struggling in the throes of property violations too, the above-cited witness, Khalil al-Saleh*, said that the trees in his land were uprooted while his grove and adjacent orchards were turned into a Turkish military base. For his part, the previously cited

witness, Sami al-Muhammad*, a local from Sharkrak village, administratively affiliated with Tal Abyad city, told PEL-Civil Waves in August 2023 that the Turkish military destroyed his house and the rest of the locals' homes across the village and turned a part of the village into a military base. He added: "The Turkish forces seized my agricultural land and annexed 40 out of 113 dunums to the Turkish military base. The remaining groves were seized by locals who stayed in the area, where they cooperated with the Türkiye-backed armed groups. Additionally, Türkiye bulldozed and uprooted 20 olive trees and 15 pomegranate trees." Elaborating on the decimation of the villagers' properties, the witness said: "I saw the Turkish bulldozers clear away the village's houses using binoculars at al-Fasel village. This village is located on the western side of the frontline and has a high altitude. I and other locals watched our houses being levelled to the ground. The bulldozers displayed the Turkish flag and were accompanied by the Shaitat Brigade. The [brigade's fighters] walked barefoot, and most of them were from Deir ez-Zor. They are famous for their long hair. They were the first to enter the Sharkrak village and identified themselves as [affiliates of the brigade]."

This statement was corroborated by witness Khalid al-Ali's* account, who is also a local of Sharkrak village. During an August 2023 interview, he said his 20-dunum piece of land in the village was seized. The land was dotted with 200 olive trees and contained a house. The house was bulldozed after its contents were looted. Additionally, the trees were bulldozed, while Khalid's property and others across the village were turned into a military base.

Properties Repurposed for Military Use After Operation Peace Spring in 2019

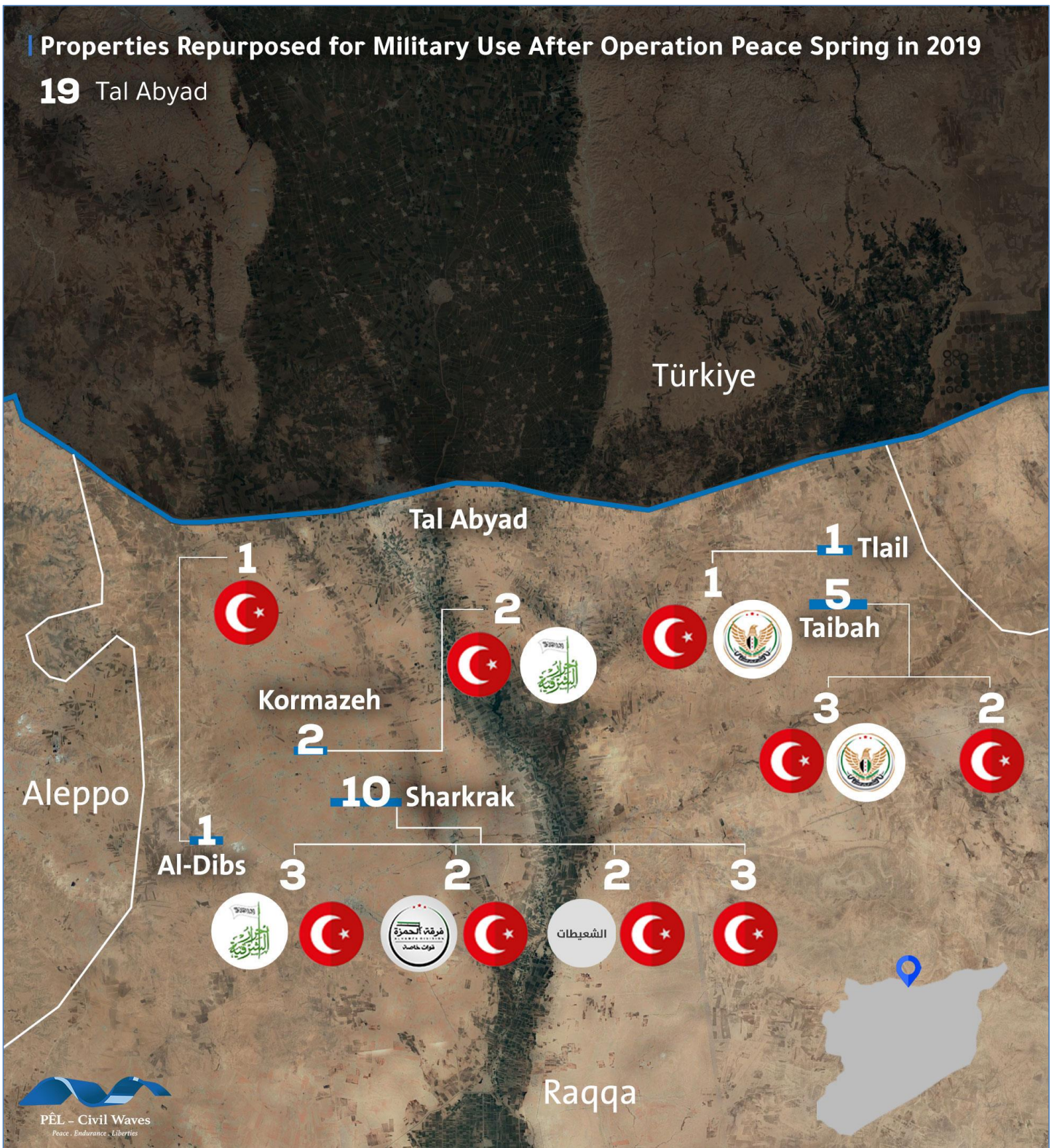
14 Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê
19 Tal Abyad



Infographic 3-The witnesses' properties in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad cities that were turned into military posts or zones after the Turkish-led Operation Peace Spring in 2019. Highlighted also are the parties involved in the property abuses.

Properties Repurposed for Military Use After Operation Peace Spring in 2019

19 Tal Abyad



Infographic 5- The witnesses' properties in Tal Abyad city that were turned into military zones after the Turkish-led Operation Peace Spring in 2019. Highlighted also are the parties involved in the property abuses.

4. Other Violations that Accompanied Property Abuses:

The testimonies collected by PEL-Civil Waves show that interviewed victims suffered other violations in tandem with breaches of their property rights, most notably looting, the burning down or sabotaging of furniture, damaging title deeds, arrest and torture, bans on returns, disrespect for the dead, and sexual harassment against women.

■ A. Sabotage of Household Items and Arrests for Ransom

Witness Mustafa al-Hussain*, a resident of Ronahi neighbourhood in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, said that his house in Ronahi neighbourhood and all three of his vehicles—a bus, a pickup truck, and a Mazda car—were seized. He added that the gunmen who took his house sabotaged the beds and closets to use the wood for heating. He narrated: “I returned to the city after I made a deal with a commander of a sub-group of the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. I accompanied him to my place to check on its contents. We saw three fighters in military outfits with shoulder badges saying Liwa Soqour al-Shamal (Northern Hawks). After they allowed me to enter my house, [. . .] I went to the rooftop and discovered that one of the house’s corners was destroyed by a mortar shell. There was an open area behind the house; it had grapevines, and olive and fig trees. Our clothes were left there, and my children’s closet and our beds were all broken and abandoned. Upon entering the residence, I witnessed the combatants chopping wood and shoving it into the heater.”

The witness added that during the visit, an armed group attempted to arrest him, saying the command was after him. The witness’s “guarantor”—the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division commander—said this most likely was to force him to pay the group money as he was well-off. The witness continued to say: “Back then, a car, in which five fighters were seated, pulled off [. . .]. They said I had to appear before the command. The person who was supposed to protect us in return for money intervened and asked them, ‘Why is he being pursued?’ They said they did not know. Following a lengthy exchange between the fighters and that person, the latter told them that [the witness] was here under his guardianship and was not involved in any trouble. He told them, ‘Have you by any chance heard that the house owner had money, or had left any documents at home that prove he is

wealthy?’ He then grabbed me by the hand, pulled me from among them, and asked me to get in the car. He said, ‘I can tell what they are after.’”

■ B. Destruction of Property Documents

The testimony of victim/witness Bashira al-Adnan* (real name) corroborates the violations that targeted and continue to target properties in the region monitored by the report. The statement also confirms that these violations were systematic and geared towards coercing the region’s population to flee the area; give up on their properties; and never contemplate a return to their hometowns. A local and a resident of al-Manajir town in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, Bashira, said that the armed groups burned down her title deeds. She narrated: “The house’s contents were all looted. They also set fire to the title deeds and other documents at home. They confiscated the house and a plot of land. Initially, they threatened they would turn the house into a military post. Today, fighters and their families reside in the house. They are armed. They wear the SNA military outfits, which display its insignia and logos. They also fly the SNA banner with the three red stars. I learned they are from the Sultan Murda Division from the writings on their weapon-mounted vehicles. Additionally, they contacted my brother using Turkish numbers several times and introduced themselves as members of the Sultan Murad Division. They told him that they had confiscated the house and would not allow him to return, allegedly because he was signing in praise of their opponents.”

Acting on their designs to force the region’s residents to abandon their properties and render them unable to prove their ownership of these properties in the future, the armed groups in control sometimes burned down the locals’ title deeds without justification. The above-cited witness, Shurouq Mustafa*, a local from al-Souda village in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, recounted that after the armed groups seized her house and lived there for nearly a year, they looted its contents; destroyed a part of it, making it inhabitable; and burned down the property documents. The witness added that she saw the ashes of these documents and other household items set to fire when she checked on the house. Ultimately, she went back to Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp in al-Hasakah city, driven by the unrepairable state of her home and fear that her husband might get arrested if they decided to return to their village.

These violations were also corroborated by witness Abu Muhammad al-Abdallah*, a local from Waradah village, administratively affiliated with Tal Abyad city. During an August 2023 interview, he said that while he prepared to flee the village, he could not take his identity documents, the house's title deed, or the document attesting to his ownership of a harvester. These documents remained at home. A neighbour, whom Muhammad did not name for safety concerns, told him that the armed groups that seized his house burned down these documents.

Interviewed in August 2023, witness Nasmah al-Saleh*, a local from Jahjah village, administratively affiliated with Tal Abyad city, who now resides in Tel Samen camp in Raqqa, dedicated to IDPs from Tal Abyad, narrated that the al-Jabha al-Shamiya/Levant Front has illegally disposed of her house and sold it out to another person. She said: "Five months after we were displaced, the al-Jabha al-Shamiya/Levant Front put our house up for sale. It was bought by a person from Hama who is a member of the Military Police and is married to two women." On other occasions, the perpetrators did not only illegally seize the victims' properties, but they went as far as selling these properties without informing the owners or obtaining their approval. During an August 2023 interview, Khuloud Muhammad*, a widow who now lives with her children at Tel Samen IDP Camp in Raqqa, narrated her tragic story, saying: "My children and I used to live in the house we inherited from my deceased husband. On the day the Turkish incursion into the region started, we fled on foot. On the same day, before we left the region, a friend of my son called us, saying that gunmen had entered our house and looted its contents. A while later, that same person informed us that the armed group that seized my son's house had sold it more than once."



Image (9)-The house belonging to witness Khuloud Muhammad in Jahjah village-Tal Abyad city satellite-geolocated based on her inputs during the interview.

■ C. Arbitrary Arrests and Torture

Among the other violation patterns that accompanied property rights abuses and which further corroborate the perpetrators' determination to compel the region's population to forcefully leave their homes were arbitrary arrests and torture. Notably, such arrests were not suffered by Kurdish locals alone. Arab residents also struggled with these breaches. One Arab witness, Hassan Shaker*, a resident of Tal Thiyab village, administratively affiliated with Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, said he was arrested and tortured by the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. He added that after the division released him, its fighters repeatedly raided his house to re-arrest him. Frustrated with the division's practices, he left the area, intending never to return as long as the armed groups remained in the region. Narrating his painful experience, he said: "On 18 October 2019, SNA fighters [from al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division] raided the village at 9:00 a.m. on board two pick-up vehicles that

displayed the name of the al-Hamzat on both sides. There were nearly 15 fighters. They arrested me and another person. We were tortured, beaten, and subjected to ill-treatment, allegedly because we were members of the autonomous administration's internal security. After I was released on 26 December 2019, I returned to the village with my family. However, 15 days later, particularly on 10 January 2020, the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division raided my house at 3:00 a.m. I managed to escape. They had designated me as a terrorist, alleging I carried out bombings in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city. Later, the village's dignitaries and the *mukhtar* (governor) they had assigned intervened to prove my innocence. Ultimately, [the division] said it would not arrest me because I was proven innocent previously. A month later, on 10 February 2020, the group stormed the village again at 6:00 a.m. They had a list of six names, including mine, to arrest. As I managed to escape, I decided to flee because of the raids into my house. I lived in Bilal ibn Rabah School in al-Misherfah in al-Hasakah. I live in a single room that serves as my bedroom and bathroom. All the contents of my house in Tal Thiyab were looted. It was confiscated but none of them [armed groups] stay there. They denied me access to the house and did not allow my family to dispose of it. Actually, none of us dared to try approaching them because they already accused me of being a terrorist."

For his part, above-cited Karim al-Said*, interviewed in August 2023, said: "His sister, who remained in the area, tried to prevent the Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Free Men of the East from bulldozing his house and the surrounding trees in Kormazeh village in Tal Abyad. They told her the house was now adjacent to the Turkish military base and thus had to be demolished and bulldozed."



Image (10)- The house belonging to witness Karim al-Hassan in Kormazeh village- Tal Abyad city satellite-geolocated based on his inputs during the interview.

Interviewed in August 2023, witness Khalid Mansour*, a local of Suluk town, administratively affiliated with Tal Abyad, said: “I did not even attempt to file a complaint to reclaim my house seized by a fighter from the al-Qadisiyah Brigade as I fear arrest and torture because my brother died on 9 October 2019 while fighting for the SDF.” The witness is haunted by those fears, especially given the suffering

his second brother experienced as he remained in the village. Narrating his brother's story, the witness said: "On 22 October 2023, fighters from al-Qadisiyah Brigade raided the house and arrested my brother, attributing that to the fact that our brother Mahmoud died while fighting alongside the SDF. Khalid was detained for nine months and ten days, during which he was subjected to all forms of physical and psychological torture. After his release, they banned him from returning home. Therefore, he now lives in a rented house in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city."

The above-cited witness, Khalid al-Issa*, also said that his brother-in-law was arrested in 2019, and his fate remains unknown. He narrated: "Two months after we were displaced, my brother-in-law visited my house. He wanted to relocate our household items so they would not be stolen. However, a group from Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Free Men of the East, headed by a person called Abu Jihad from Um Izzam village, arrested him. His fate remains unknown."

Notably, the concerns interviewed witnesses share, especially worries over the consequences of filing complaints regarding their seized properties, are corroborated by the documentation carried out by the COI across several reports. The COI confirms that "[t]he arrest and detention of individuals were often carried out by brigades of the Syrian National Army in conjunction with property appropriation, including of agricultural lands, which ultimately forced many people to leave the area and continue to prevent their return."⁴

■ D. A Ban on Returns and Disrespect for the Dead

On top of all these violations, the involved armed groups, as well as the Turkish government, attempted to erase the displaced locals' memories and sever all ties they had with their home areas since they predominated in the region in the aftermath of Operation Peace Spring. On a few occasions, the armed groups prevented locals from even burying their dead loved ones in their original villages and towns. On this, witness Salwa al-Amin*, a local of the Daoudia village, administratively affiliated with Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, said that her entire village was turned into a Turkish military base and the majority of the homes there

⁴ See, for instance, paragraph 76 of the report dated August 17, 2022, and paragraphs 40 and 41 of the report dated March 2, 2020, published on the official website of Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/documentation>

were bulldozed. She also narrated how they were banned from burying the *mukhtar* (governor) in their village: “On 25 October 2019, the Mu'tasim Division of the SNA's 2nd Corps controlled the village. A month after they established dominance there, they looted all the village's properties. Nearly two months later, at the onset of 2020, the Turkish military entered the village and transformed it into a military base.” Delving further into the pain she and other villagers experienced, she added: “Our village's *mukhtar*, Said Mustafa Salman, died after we fled. We tried to bury him in the village's cemetery. To this end, we communicated with the locals in the nearby Madbaa village. They asked the SNA to allow us to bury him in the village. However, the army told them that [we] no longer have a village to demand to bury [our] dead there. Therefore, we buried him in the cemetery in Tal l'rfan near the al-Khaznawi Institute. We placed his body in a coffin so we could move it to our village when we returned there.”

This testimony is strikingly consistent with information in paragraph 78 of the COI's report published on 12 September 2022, which says that “brigades of the Syrian National Army and Turkish ground forces continued to use civilian properties for military purposes. Recent satellite imagery confirmed the continuous presence of a Turkish military base inside the village, including a possible expansion of the facility to the north. Kurdish residents have been prevented from returning to Dawoudiya since at least 2020, and homes have been destroyed.”⁵

⁵ Link to the report available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/documentation>



Image 11- The house belonging to witness Salwa al-Amin in Daoudia village-Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city satellite-geolocated based on her inputs during the interview.

5. Victims Refrain from Reclaiming Their Properties:

The armed groups operating under the Türkiye-backed SNA's 2nd Corps⁶ announced the formation of a Restitution Committee in the Peace Spring strip a year after they took over the area, helped by Türkiye.⁷ However, the committee remains a titular body, as it has no effective role in restoring the victims' rights. The committee's failure is not shocking given its structure, as it consists of delegates of the armed groups dominating the area, who are the same factions involved in the violations documented in this report. It is a case where the judge is also the opponent. This is corroborated by the testimonies collected by PEI-Civil Waves for this report, for none of the interviewed witnesses mentioned the committee, nor have they actually heard of it. Therefore, the crushing majority of the witnesses have never filed complaints to reclaim their properties, neither to the committee nor to any of the "institutions" running the area. It is needless to say that should the committee have been efficient and capable of implementing the tasks it was created for, the victims would not have refrained from filing complaints with it or with the bodies responsible for assessing those complaints. Notably, a large segment of the witnesses said they did not submit complaints for fear of reprisals from the armed groups involved in the violations.⁸ Another segment stressed they did not make

⁶ The SNA's 2nd Corps comprises of several armed groups, including the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, the Sultan Murad Division, The Mu'tasim Division, The Northern Hawks Brigade, Army of Islam/Jaysh al-Islam, and al-Rahman Corps. For additional information, see: "The Syrian National Army (SNA): Structure, Functions, and Three Scenarios for its Relationship with Damascus", GCSP, 19 November 2020 (last accessed 15 August 2023).

<https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/syrian-national-army-sna-structure-functions-and-three-scenarios-its-relationship>

⁷ "The SNA Forms Restitution Committee in Syria's Ras al-Ayn After Violations Upsurge in Peace Spring Zone" (in Arabic), *Al-Quds*, 21 December 2020 (last visited: 15 August 2023).

<https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%D9%81/>.

⁸ See paragraph 76 of the COI report, published on 17 August 2022, which says: "Interviewees described how they had been threatened with arrests or otherwise forced to withdraw complaints they had submitted to various informal local grievances committees, composed of individuals from religious and tribal entities and from the Syrian National Army, about extortion, property appropriation and the imposition of levies, including due to the risk of reprisals by brigades of the Syrian National Army against whose members complaints were submitted, as those brigades were themselves involved in the complaint and restitution process." The report is available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/documentation>

such steps as they distrust the institutions in the region because they are incapable of performing their legal duties, namely, remedying property and human rights infringements. Other witnesses said they did not opt for reaching out to the committee for both reasons, for fear of the consequences and a lack of faith in the utility of filing complaints in the first place.

For instance, witness Nariman al-Khalid*, interviewed on 26 July 2023, said she did not file a complaint to reclaim her house, which was seized by a fighter from the Sultan Murad Division and where he lives now with his family, attributing this to rampant insecurity in the region and also her concern over the consequences. She said: “No, I never went nor attempted to return to the town after we fled. Neither I nor any member of our family did this because the majority of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city’s locals escaped, especially Kurds, due to insecurity and the looting of homes and shops. Additionally, we did not delegate any person to file a complaint to reclaim our house, afraid we would bring them harm; they might have been exposed to arrest and torture. I always hear my relatives displaced to al-Hasakah talking about returning locals getting arrested, tortured and asked to pay ransoms or forced to pay ransoms by the armed groups there.” This statement was corroborated by the victim, Safaa al-Saleh*, a former tailor interviewed in January 2023 at her tent in Serê Kaniyê IDP Camp. She narrated: “After we fled Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, neither I nor my husband returned there. However, I asked a friend who remained in the city to check on our 240 m² house in the al-Hawarneh neighbourhood. The house was seized, and its contents looted, most probably by the Mu'tasim Division, since the al-Hawarneh neighbourhood is controlled by this division. My friend told me she went to the house and knocked on the door. An armed man showed up and was staying there with his family. He asked who she was and why was she asking about the house. My friend also said that other gunmen emerged from the house and that she was scared and returned to her home. She called me and said she would never visit my house again. After this incident, we did not ask anyone else to inquire about our house or try to reclaim it.”

Several other witnesses gave matching accounts, and it remains futile to cite them all, especially as they emphasize similar concerns over complaints; many said they did not dare file complaints, fearing the repercussions, while others attributed their abstinence to a lack of trust in the bodies assigned to receiving the complaints. For

instance, witness Hassan Shaker*, who was cited above as having been arrested and tortured by the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, stated that he did not submit any complaint to any party, nor did he ever contemplate the issue since there is not a fair or capable body to keep the armed groups in check, curb their tyranny, or denounce their actions. Having similar views as the other victims, including Adanan Malla Matter, the victim, Ahmad Hesseh*, whose house in the al-Karamah neighbourhood in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê town and his vegetable shop in al-Hal marketplace were both seized, said he also did not trust the “institutions” operating in the area. Elaborating on that detail, he said: “We reached out to my neighbour’s wife and asked her to check on our house. Indeed, in the company of her relative, she visited the commander of the Jadi armed group, named after the commander himself. I have a photo of the house with the name of the armed group written on it; it is affiliated with the Mu'tasim Division. They asked for permission to enter my house. However, the commander, the so-called Jadi, refused to allow them in. He told them the house was confiscated because it was owned by a party member. They claimed I was a member of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) without proof. That is why I cannot return to the town to file a complaint because all the parties are connected. No entity can bring my seized house back or guarantee my safety. Also, I cannot delegate anybody to do that, fearing they would be harassed and harmed by the controlling armed groups.”

In her turn, the above-cited witness, Nasmah al-Saleh*, attributed her concerns to the countless violations suffered by acquaintances. She said that the owner of the shop she rented to run a sewing workshop was killed by the al-Jabha al-Shamiya/Levant Front in 2019 by a firing squad. The armed group shot the owner dead because he accepted to watch over a van a Kurdish person left under his protection. The armed group accused him of cooperating with the Kurds. Witness Rajaa Muhammad*, a local and resident of Tiabah/Arbikar village, administratively affiliated with Tal Abyad city, cited similar abuses against a relative and his family, who remained in the village, during an August 2023 interview. She said: “We did not attempt to return because the armed groups are after us, according to our neighbours. The allegation was that we were Kurds and we were dealing with the autonomous administration. One of our relatives and his wife stayed in the village. He used to work for one of the administration’s *komins* (Commune/local

administration). Due to this, he and his wife were arrested, beaten, and tortured several times despite their old age. They tried to flee the village but failed.”

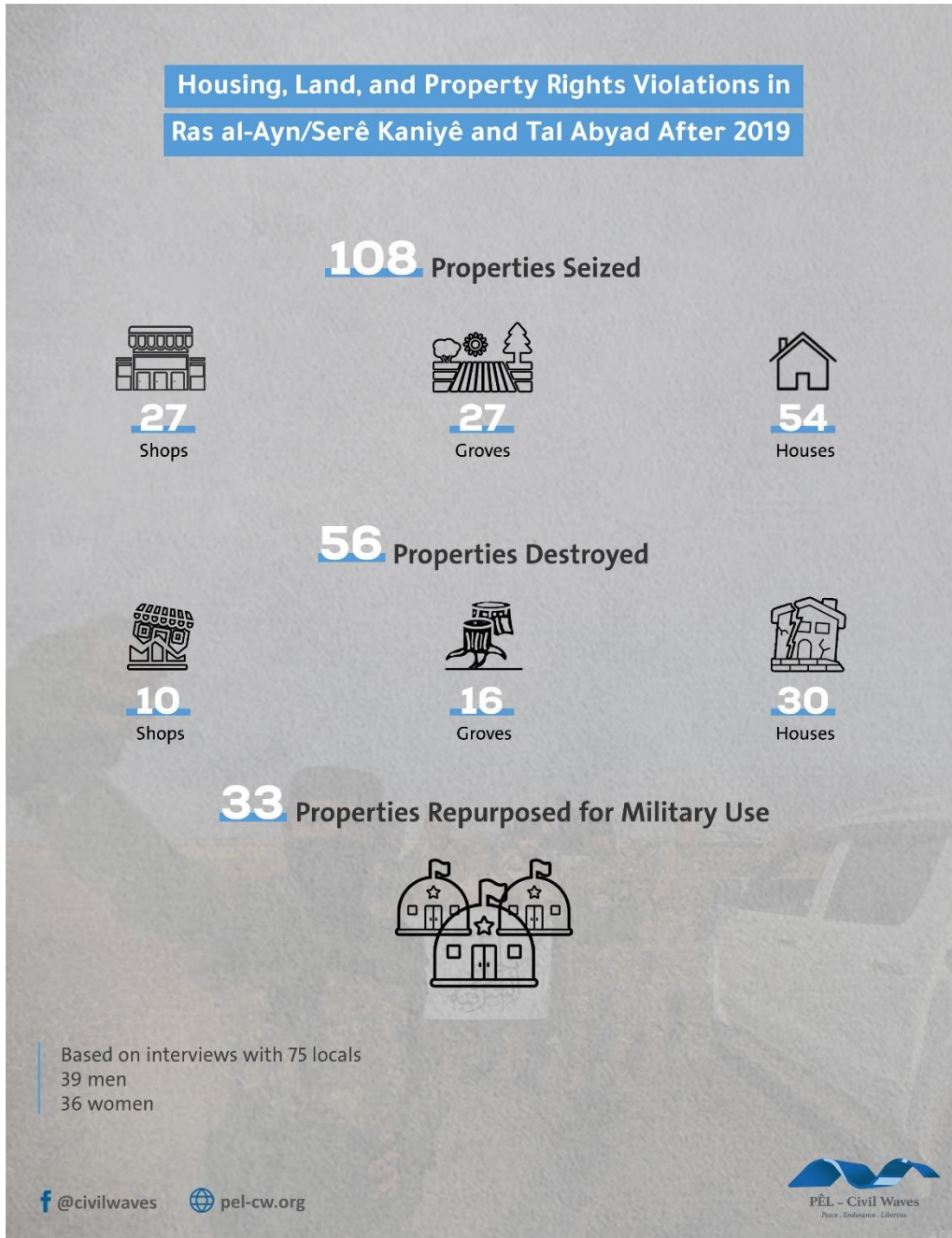
Interviewed in August 2023 as well, Maryam al-Naser*, a local and resident of Hammam al-Turkman village, administratively affiliated with Tal Abyad city, who now lives in Tel Samen IDP Camp in Raqqa city, said that she cannot summon enough courage to return to the region and demand back her properties. Several of her properties were confiscated by the Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Free Men of the East, while the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat division seized the rest. The witness is deterred by the fact that she used to head one of the autonomous administration’s *Komins*. Notably, the witnesses stressed that heading a Komin is a voluntary job that aims at regulating villagers’ affairs, adding that the position is equivalent to the *mukhtar*’s elsewhere in Syria.

Another segment of the witnesses said that filing complaints was a futile action since their confiscated properties were already transformed into Turkish military posts and because they could not demand that the Turkish military return their plots of land and leave the area. For instance, witness Salwa al-Amin* said that her house and the rest of the homes in the Daoudia village were bulldozed, the entire village was rendered a Turkish military base, and villagers were blatantly prevented from returning to it. She added: “They did not allow us to return. Our elderly even asked the Mu'tasim Division to permit locals to return to their homes. However, the division answered that those plots of land no longer belonged to them and that locals would not be granted permission to return. Additionally, after the village was turned into a Turkish military base, the villagers asked the Turkish forces to warrant their returns, as they asked locals in the nearby Madbaa village to mediate communications.” The witness said that “a while later, the Madbaa villagers said that the Turkish forces denied our request to return.” This statement was corroborated by witness Samer Mustafa*, whose house and 850-dunum piece of land in al-Manakh village, affiliated with Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city after the village was entirely turned into a Turkish military base. He narrated: “I can see my house through binoculars. It has been turned into a military post because the village now falls on the frontlines. I am not entirely sure with which side the military post that has been established on the remains of the village’s property is affiliated. However, all the troops are Turkish and wear Turkish military outfits. The Turkish flag is flown there as well. According to the information circulating among the people, the al-

Hamza/al-Hamzat is in control of our area.” The above-cited witness, Sami al-Muhammad*, also said he did not file a complaint or ask for his property because he feared arrest and because he was convinced that the claim was futile after his homes were bulldozed and his land was turned into a Turkish military base. He added: “I did not visit the region despite my strong desire to return there. Both my houses were bulldozed, and my agricultural land was turned into a Turkish military base. I am afraid to return or even file a complaint for fear of arrest or assassination because these armed groups cannot be held accountable, as they have extrajudicially killed many civilians with impunity. There is no judicial authority to hold them accountable. The Turkish army supervised home bulldozing operations, later using these homes’ rubble to establish dirt mounds around their bases. Even though Türkiye claims to be the guarantor State, responsible for controlling the actions of these militants, it has committed more violations than the factions, as they are the ones who allowed 80 homes to be bulldozed in the Sharkrak village to build a wall around the military base. We need to submit a complaint to the United Nations in the hope that our voice will be heard.”

Only two of the interviewed victims tried to reclaim their properties, but they did not achieve any results. The above-cited witness, Bashira al-Adnan*, who narrated the details of her house confiscation, recounted her mother’s experience as she attempted to file a complaint to recover the house: “My mother went to check on the house and found it entirely looted and inhabited by a family of members of the Sultan Murad Division. She went to a Turkish military post that had been set up in the silos of Manajir village and submitted her complaint directly to a Turkish officer, helped by a translator. The officer promised to return the stolen items, but he did nothing. After that, my mother was threatened with imprisonment by the Sultan Murad Division which took over the house. Because she had health issues, she could not argue with them and returned to al-Hasakah.” The Above-cited witness, Khalid al-Hamdan*, went through an experience somewhat similar to that of Bashira’s mother as he attempted to file a complaint to recover his property. He narrated, “I decided to go to my village to check on my property to recover it. I went there on the first or second day of January 2020 with my friend on a motorcycle. After several failed attempts at entering the village, we went to a Turkish military base in al-Said village, and we met with a Turkish officer and explained the matter to him with the assistance of a translator. He responded that

he had nothing to do with the people who seized our property, but rather they (the Turks) were responsible for protecting us only, and thus we no longer had any hope of recovering anything, and we returned to al-Hasakah. I never tried again after that.”



Infographic 6- Patterns of violations in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad after the Türkiye-led Operation Peace Spring.

6. Characterization of Türkiye's Presence in the "Peace Spring" Strip:

This section will characterize Türkiye's control over northern Syria in general and the areas targeted by Operation "Peace Spring" in particular from a legal standpoint. To this end, it is necessary to refer to the rules of international law that govern situations such as those in the report, which involve the entry of foreign military forces into Syrian territories without permission from the Syrian State, as well as these forces' use of Syrian armed groups they sponsor during said entry.⁹

Article 42 of the 1907 Hague Convention respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land states that "[t]erritory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised." This description is applicable as long as the land is under the effective control of the aggressor State, regardless of whether it exercises this control/authority directly or through its proxies in the region. Notably, paragraph 93 of the COI report dated February 8, 2022, emphasized that "in areas under effective Turkish control, Türkiye has a responsibility to, as far as possible, ensure public order and safety, and to afford special protection to women and children" referring to Northern Aleppo, and the Ra's al-Ayn and Tal Abyad regions.¹⁰ Within this perspective, Türkiye's presence in Syria falls under occupation, a status that has already been emphasized by [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#).

7. Legal Responsibility for Violations in the "Peace Spring" Strip:

The property rights violations documented in the area the report monitors were perpetrated by several SNA-affiliated armed groups or directly by the Turkish military, according to data and testimonies collected by the PEL-Civil Waves team.

The SNA armed groups identified by the witnesses legally operate under the mantle of the SIG's Ministry of Defence. This stems from the fact that it was the defence

⁹ "Syria Denounces Türkiye's Intention to Intervene against ISIS" (in Arabic), *AlJazeera*, 4 October 2014 (last accessed 15 August 2023). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2014/10/4/%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%8A%D9%85>

¹⁰ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, available from: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F49%2F77&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

ministry that declared the formation of the SNA on 30 December 2017.¹¹ Defining its duties, the ministry also said it is “concerned with the affairs of defence and the SNA and works to organize the military and revolutionary forces under the umbrella of this army in cooperation with the commanders of the corps and other formations to move as quickly as possible to the military state other armies enjoy, as they operate hierarchically and according to a chain of command and control.”¹² Furthermore, the SIG’s defence minister has attended more than one military event and parade by the involved SNA factions and made several inspection tours to sites operated by the armed groups in this report’s geographical scope.¹³ Therefore, the SIG’s defence ministers, who assumed their duties during the period in which these violations were committed, must be held accountable, based on the presumed responsibility of the commander, according to Article 28 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court—especially since they cannot deny their knowledge of these crimes and violations given the COI’s reports, which consistently confirmed the responsibility of the SNA armed groups for these violations. However, at odds with its legal duties, the ministry did not take effective action to hold accountable either the command or individuals within the listed SNA armed groups who were found responsible for the recorded breaches.

Notably, similar legal responsibilities apply to the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, as it is the political body that places such trust in the SIG and has the power to dismiss ministers together or individually, hold them accountable, accept their resignation, and approve any ministerial reshuffle.¹⁴

Türkiye, according to its status established in the previous section as an Occupying State, is legally responsible for protecting the property of the civilian population in the areas it occupies, as it is obligated to apply the rules of international

¹¹ “SIG Announces Formation of SNA (Photos)” (in Arabic), *Enab Baladi*, 30 December 2017 (last accessed 14 August 2023). <https://www.enabbaladi.net/194981/>

¹² For additional information, see: “The Ministry of Defense” (in Arabic), *Syrian Interim Government* (last accessed 14 August 2023). <https://www.syriaig.net/ar/169/about>

¹³ “SIG Defense Minister Completes Field Tour in Peace Spring Region” (in Arabic), *Syrian Interim Government* (last accessed 14 August 2023). <https://syriaig.net/public/ar/848/content>

¹⁴ Paragraph 5 of Article 11 of the “Basic Statute of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces,” available from: <https://www.etilaf.org/about-us/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%b8%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%94%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%b3%d9%8a-%d9%84%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%8a%d9%94%d8%aa%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%81-2022>

humanitarian law in the monitored areas. This requires that civilian property not be seized or destroyed unless military operations inevitably necessitate such destruction,¹⁵ and the Occupying State must prove the existence of an imperative military necessity. Therefore, the Occupying State must hold accountable those responsible for these violations, whether members of the Turkish military or the leaders and members of the SNA, because the latter is under its effective control—especially since there is no indication that the looting or destruction of the property discussed in the report was carried out for an inevitable military necessity.

8. Legal Characterization of Violations Committed in Türkiye-Controlled Areas:

The actions committed by the de facto authorities against the property and housing rights of the locals and residents of the region covered by the report are considered crimes punishable by law. Additionally, the legal definition or description of the criminal acts reported may differ under international and local laws, which also entail different penalties. Therefore, these criminal acts (violations) will be characterized in the view of international and local frameworks separately:

■ Reported Violations under International Treaties and Instruments

Several international covenants and treaties attach great importance to the rights to property and prohibit the violation of this right. Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for example, establishes the human right to property ownership and prohibits depriving any person of their property arbitrarily. Additionally, international humanitarian law bestows special protection on buildings and considers them part of civilian objects,¹⁶ which may not be attacked by parties to the conflict, stressing that these parties must distinguish “between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives.”¹⁷ Furthermore, international humanitarian law establishes that “[i]n case of doubt whether an object which is normally dedicated to civilian purposes, such as a place of worship, a house or other dwelling or a school, is being used to make an effective contribution to military action, it shall be presumed not to be so

¹⁵ Articles 2 and 52 of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, available from: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949>

¹⁶ Article 52 of the 1977 First Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949.

¹⁷ Article 48 of the 1977 First Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949.

used.”¹⁸ That is, it has skewed doubt in favor of civilian objects protected from targeting, and therefore, whoever claims the opposite must prove the validity of their claims. The principle of distinction between military objectives and civilian objects and the obligation not to attack civilian objects constitutes a customary rule under customary international humanitarian law. This law also requires parties to the conflict to respect private property and not confiscate it.¹⁹

Paragraph 2 of Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998, which entered into force in 2001, affirmed that the destruction and seizure of property without military necessity is a war crime, especially when committed within the framework of a general plan or policy or the framework of a large-scale perpetration process. This applies to both international and non-international armed conflicts. It has been shown by the multiple testimonies cited in the report that the property violations in the monitored region were committed deliberately and systematically and included the vast majority of the target villages’ movable and immovable properties, which makes the beaches of a large-scale. Additionally, Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War considers extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly a grave breach. In its turn, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classifies serious violations of the four Geneva Conventions as war crimes.

■ **Reported Violations under the Existing Syrian Constitution and Laws**

PEL-Civil Waves has multiple reservations about the enforced Syrian constitution for various reasons that remain beyond the scope of this report to enumerate. However, this constitution includes some legal principles that resonate with international covenants and agreements, some of which were cited above, including Article 15, which establishes that “[c]ollective and individual private ownership shall be protected in accordance with the following basis:

1. General confiscation of funds shall be prohibited;
 - A. Private ownership shall not be removed except in the public interest by a decree and against fair compensation according to the law;

¹⁸ Article 52 of the 1977 First Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949.

¹⁹ Rules 7, 8, 9, 10, and 51 of the “Customary International Humanitarian Law Volume I: Rules”, ICRC. Available from: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/customary-international-humanitarian-law-i-icrc-eng.pdf>

- B. Confiscation of private property shall not be imposed without a final court ruling;
 - C. Private property may be confiscated for necessities of war and disasters by a law and against fair compensation;
2. Compensation shall be equivalent to the real value of the property.”

According to the statements of the witnesses/victims, the seizures of the movable and immovable properties are carried out against their will and constitute the crime of looting. Furthermore, the testimonies show that the victims were not compensated. On the contrary, the vast majority of those who lost their property did not dare to reclaim it for fear of being subjected to arrest or other types of abuse.

The Türkiye-founded “courts” in the areas covered by the report apply Syrian laws. Therefore, this section will put the reported violations in the perspective of civil and criminal laws, especially those in force before the Syrian uprising in 2011.²⁰ The violations constitute a breach of Articles 771 and 768 of the Syrian Civil Code promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 84 of 1949. Under Article 771, it remains impermissible to deprive anyone of their property except in the circumstances determined by the law, provided that this is in exchange for fair compensation. For its part, Article 768 guarantees that the owner of a thing alone shall be entitled to the use, exploitation, and disposition thereof within the limits of the law.

Additionally, the violations committed by the armed factions identified by the witnesses are at odds with Articles 723, 625, and 626 of the Syrian Penal Code issued by Decree No. 148 of 1949. The Penal Code classifies real estate seizures without an official title as usurpation of real property. Article 723 of the code stipulates that “whoever does not hold an official title deed or a document entitling him/her to dispose of the property and takes possession of a property or part of a property in the hands of another shall be punished with imprisonment for up to six months.” The article also stipulates a penalty of two to six months if the offense is accompanied by a threat or coercion of persons or things, and from six months to three years if it is committed by a group of at least two armed persons.” Applicable to several accounts provided by the report’s witnesses, the provisions of Articles

²⁰ Paragraph 70 of the COI published on 31 January 2019, available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/documentation>

625 and 626 classify theft as the looting of assets from homes that are seized after windows and doors are removed or forced open.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations:

Guaranteeing the right to housing and property is considered one of the basic conditions for the voluntary and safe return of forcibly displaced populations to their original places of residence. However, as the report's testimonies exhibit, the right to housing and property in the monitored areas is, at odds with international and national legal frameworks alike, neither protected nor attributed due sanctity. On the contrary, this right, in addition to other rights, was violated in a systematic and widespread manner. Notably, ensuring the voluntary and dignified return of IDPs is one of the pillars of achieving the political transition visualized in UN Security Council Resolution No. 2254 of 2015 and the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. Without the aforementioned return, neither the desired democratic political process nor the transition to a Syrian State where the rule of law prevails—which are the ambitions of every Syrian who believes in the principles of justice, equality, and freedom—are attainable. These three principles certainly demand a serious approach to the human rights violations committed in Syria, including those committed in the areas covered by the report, and thus the necessity of restoring breached rights, providing justice to the victims, and holding the perpetrators accountable. This genuine approach is in demand, especially since the forced evacuation reported by the victims and the placement of other people in their place is a major factor that plays into changing the area's demography and thus disrupting the social diversity it enjoyed for a long time, while also warranting the imposition of one race, color, religion, or language on the region. Such displacements, as those reported, are triggered by violations that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, or even the crime of genocide, as they primarily target a specific population group and not others.

To address the current repercussions and further likely devastating impacts of the violations documented in the report, PEL-Civil Waves believes it is necessary to take action at several levels and by several parties, both international and local. The serious and intensive work done by this report's team has yielded several inputs, which PEL-Civil Waves believes must be presented to actors in the Syrian affair as they hold potential for achieving a just, comprehensive, and sustainable peace in Syria. These inputs are condensed into the following recommendations:

■ **UN Institutions and International Community:**

- The UN institutions, the U.S., and the countries of the European Union (EU) should exert constant pressure on the Turkish government to recognize its status as an Occupying Power in the Syrian territories where it holds control, including those monitored by this report, to oblige it to carry out its duties as an Occupying State towards the residents and locals of those regions. Türkiye has a duty to protect them and guarantee their legitimate rights, including housing and property rights, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.
- The UN institutions, the U.S., and EU countries should cooperate with and offer necessary support to human rights bodies and organizations documenting violations by Türkiye and the SNA in areas under their control. Furthermore, they shall work to develop a list of individuals and institutions regarding whom consistent evidence has been collected, which indicates their involvement in the violations committed; subject them to sanctions specific to financial and banking operations; and designate them as terrorist organizations in preparation for cutting off all types of support currently available to them.
- The U.S. and the EU countries, among others, where Syrians live, especially those whose laws do not establish the principle of universal jurisdiction, should work to amend their legislation to ensure an effective exercise of universal jurisdiction, which helps hold perpetrators accountable regardless of the location of the crime, especially if it falls under war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- The Independent International Commission of Inquiry should continue to monitor and document violations committed in Syrian territories controlled by Türkiye, especially those related to HLP rights. It should also publish thematic reports specific to HLP rights in those areas.
- The UN must officially recognize the camps housing IDPs from areas affected by Operation Peace Spring; provide the necessary support to mitigate the dire effects triggered by the violations committed against them by the Turkish military and affiliated SNA armed groups; and cooperate intensively with humanitarian and rights organizations working in the field of relief.
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■ **The Syrian Government:**

- The Syrian government should perform its legal duties towards the population in Türkiye-occupied areas and thus submit official complaints against the Turkish government to the UN concerned bodies, especially the International Court of Justice, to end Türkiye's occupation in those areas. It should also demand that the Turkish government stop supporting the SNA armed groups, which follow its orders and are involved in committing human rights violations in their areas of operation.
- The government should provide necessary legal support to those displaced from the Türkiye-occupied areas, especially those residing in the camps. Support should be financial and legal, including providing IDPs with personal and property documents they lost. It also should grant the UN immediate approval to use border crossings to provide humanitarian aid to communities in those areas. Furthermore, it should offer humanitarian and relief support to IDPS from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad. Most importantly, it should submit an official request to the UN to register the camps in northern and eastern Syria in which they reside to facilitate their access to UN assistance.

■ **Local and International Civil Society Organizations:**

- Civil society organizations (CSOs) should professionally and impartially document violations committed in Syria in general and in Türkiye-occupied areas in particular and share their documentation with international human rights institutions and courts that prosecute perpetrators based on the principle of universal jurisdiction. Additionally, they should intensify mobilization and advocacy for victims of violations by the Turkish military and the SNA armed groups; issue periodic reports in this regard; and hold periodic seminars and conferences that document and shed light on these entities' violations against the civilian population to raise the awareness of the international community of the reality of these violations and the parties behind them, as well as others that provide these parties with impunity.
- They should raise IDPs' awareness of their basic rights, the necessity of not stopping demanding those rights, and cooperating with organizations working in the field of documentation to uncover violations by the Turkish military and SNA armed groups. They also should inform IDPs of the necessity of preserving documents that prove their rights to property and housing and

assist them legally and financially, if possible, to issue replacement copies for damaged or lost ones.

■ **The National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces**

- The Coalition and the SIG must exercise their powers to prevent armed groups from committing violations against the civilian population and their property and ensure genuine and fair accountability for perpetrators, especially since they claim that these groups are part of their institutions and follow their orders. They should issue a decision declaring all property buying and selling operations that have taken place in the regions under their administration since the outbreak of war to be invalid, stressing that this decision will remain in effect until a political agreement is reached that guarantees the formation of a government that represents all Syrians, regardless of their affiliations, under Security Council Resolution No. 2254 of 2015 or any other future resolutions that could complement Resolution 2254 or even replace it.

■ **The Kurdish National Council:**

- The Kurdish National Council (KNC), as a member of the Syrian National Coalition, must bear at least political and moral responsibility for the violations committed in the Peace Spring strip. The pretext that the armed groups, even if they are officially affiliated with the coalition, do not obey the coalition's orders does not negate the responsibility of the coalition, including the KNC, to at least monitor these violations and work clearly and diligently to stop them. Therefore, the KNC is required to assume its responsibilities and use its presence within the coalition to keep tabs on violations, assist victims in litigation, recover their property, and condemn the practices of the perpetrators. The KNC should also demand that Türkiye, as the Occupying Power and the actual force controlling the region, as well as the State supporting the Syrian opposition, assume its responsibilities in ending violations against the residents of this region and stopping all policies of demographic change there.

■ **The Autonomous Administration:**

- The administration must provide the necessary support to IDPs from Türkiye-occupied areas who reside in territories under its control, especially camp residents; work to provide them with appropriate job opportunities; and

target them with programs and activities that help them engage in the labor market as well as integrate into the host community.

- The administration should help IDPs who wish to return to their original areas of residence and support efforts aimed at preserving property rights, especially issuing ownership and documents for IDPs from all areas occupied by the Turkish military.
- The administration should facilitate the work of CSOs working in the fields of documentation, legal, and humanitarian support for victims of the Turkish occupation and refrain from imposing fees or taxes on activities targeting those victims.



About “PÊL”

PÊL- Civil Waves is an independent, non-governmental, and non-profit organization that works to strengthen the roles of women, youth, and forcibly displaced communities in Syria, founded in 2013.

“PÊL” works in a diverse multi-ethnic, religious, social, and cultural community and believes that protecting and managing diversity and including all residents fairly guarantees sustainable peace. To this end, “PÊL” works to engage all citizens without prejudice or discrimination and at all levels. We believe that promoting community dialogue between individuals and different population groups and between them and local governance structures is essential in easing current tensions and establishing a more just future.

“PÊL” believes the ongoing conflict in Syria since 2011, associated with decades of bad policies, has affected the environment and created significant challenges that affect the lives of the population now and the country's future for decades to come. To this end, we promote awareness of environmental protection and the expansion of green spaces, monitoring ecological problems and their link to destabilizing social cohesion and developing solutions and alternatives to face these challenges.

“PÊL” focuses on victims of forced displacement. It seeks to strengthen the response to the housing, land, and property rights violations in Syria and enables the affected people to organize themselves and defend their cases. We believe that systematic and expanded legal and narrative documentation of land, housing, and property rights violations is essential in ensuring the dignified return of forcibly displaced and internally displaced persons to their areas of origin. Therefore, “PÊL” documents the testimonies and narrative stories of the victims of these violations and supports advocacy efforts and legal follow-up in this context.



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