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Support of investigations against crimes in Afrin/Northern Syria

Six years ago, in January 2018, Türkiye and allied armed militias of the Syrian National Army (SNA) began bombing the Afrin region as part of the so-called "Olive Branch" military operation. The military offensive lasted over two months and led to the displacement of more than 300,000 civilians, the majority of whom were Kurds. With the support of Türkiye, the armed militias established an arbitrary rule that continues to this day. Since then, the population in north-west Syria, particularly the Kurdish citizens, has endured widespread and systematic violations, including, inter alia, forced disappearances, forced displacement, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, and destruction or seizure of property.

As Members of the European Parliament, we vehemently condemn the Turkish occupation of Syrian territories and the severe human rights violations perpetrated by Turkish-backed militias in north-west Syria and the Turkish air strikes on civilian infrastructure in north-east Syria, which deprive many residents of electricity and water. We urge the European Union and all its member states to join in condemning these actions. We call upon them to leverage every diplomatic, political, and legal instrument at their disposal to exert pressure on Türkiye, urging an immediate cessation of severe human rights violations in Afrin and other territories of the Turkish-occupied region in Syria. Given Türkiye's membership in NATO, it bears a commitment to a multilateral foreign policy and the safeguarding of human rights.

We stand in Solidarity with victims and survivors of these grave human rights violations and affirm their unalienable right to justice. These human rights violations committed by pro-Turkish and Islamist militias are crimes under international law and can be investigated anywhere in the world under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Together with six survivors of the crimes, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) and their partners filed a criminal complaint with the German Federal Public Prosecutor's Office on 18 January 2024, calling for a comprehensive investigation of the perpetrators.

So far, some crimes of the Assad regime and Islamist groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, have been the focus of investigations in Europe. However, the suffering experienced by the predominantly Kurdish civilian population in north-west Syria has not yet been addressed. We strongly urge the German Federal Prosecutor in Karlsruhe to initiate a thorough investigation. We call on other member states of the European Union to join in these efforts, ensuring that all actors in the Syrian war are held accountable and that justice is served to all Syrian citizens.

Katrin Langensiepen (Greens/EFA)

Nikos Papandreou (S&D)

Dietmar Köster (S&D)

Malin Björk (The Left)

Emmanouil Fragkos (ECR)

Tineke Strik (Greens/EFA)

Jan-Christoph Oetjen (Renew)

Özlem Demirel (The Left)

Malte Galée (Greens/EFA)