

Report on **INTERNATIONAL CRIMES**

Committed by and on behalf of the government of the Syrian
Arab Republic in January and February 2026.

MAF-DAD

Association for Democracy and International Law

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Part 1 Introduction

Background

On 6 January 2026 widescale attacks by the Syrian Transitional Government (**STG**) began against civilian neighbourhoods of Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city. In the course of these attacks many people were killed, and thousands of civilians were displaced from their homes. Following the events in Aleppo, the STG began an advance against areas held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (**SDF**). Widescale targeting of civilians was reported at the time, and the events gave rise to a humanitarian catastrophe in which vast numbers of civilians were displaced from their homes. On 30 January 2026, a ceasefire agreement between the STG and the SDF was announced.

At the beginning of February 2026, the Association for Democracy and International Law (**MAF-DAD**) organised an Independent Fact-Finding Mission (**FFM**) with legal and forensic medical expertise. The objective of the FFM was to collect evidence and produce a report on conflict-related violations in North and East Syria (**NES**) from the beginning of January 2026, analysing findings against applicable standards of international law.

Members of the Fact-Finding Team (**FFT**) were in northeast Syria between 21 February 2026 and 17 March 2026, collecting evidence using the methods described in Part 4 of this report. This report is based on the evidence collected by the FFT in the locations accessible to them, alongside other evidence made available to them. The list of interviewees at Appendix III of the report gives an overview of the geographical scope of evidence gathered.



Authors

The FFT was composed of six members, including three lawyers and a forensic physician. The members of the FFT listed below also contributed to this report.

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MAF-DAD

The Association for Democracy and International Law e.V. (MAF-DAD) is a Germany-based NGO founded in 2006 by lawyers, human rights activists and others committed to human rights, international law and democratic structures. Its work focuses on defending fundamental rights, documenting and legally addressing serious human rights violations and international crimes, and supporting affected communities in pursuing justice and accountability. Since its establishment, MAF-DAD has worked extensively on violations affecting Kurdish populations, with a particular focus on Rojava and northern Syria since 2014.

MAF-DAD has conducted two delegations to Rojava and has maintained direct contact with local lawyers, judges, human rights defenders and NGO workers involved in documenting international crimes. Its work includes the collection and legal assessment of information, support for local documentation efforts and the identification of avenues for accountability where conventional international mechanisms are unavailable or jurisdictionally restricted in relation to Syria, Turkey and Iraq.

As part of these efforts, MAF-DAD initiated the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal proceedings concerning *Rojava vs. Turkey*, bringing allegations of violations against the Kurdish population of Rojava before the Tribunal. MAF-DAD has also pursued accountability through a criminal complaint before the German Federal Public Prosecutor concerning alleged systematic attacks against the Kurdish population of Rojava and the potential responsibility of Turkish officials.

This long-standing engagement provides MAF-DAD with particular expertise in assessing the January 2026 attacks against the Kurdish population in Aleppo and Rojava, including their factual and historical context, patterns of violations, their potential qualification under international criminal law, questions of individual and command responsibility, and possible avenues for accountability and legal redress.

Part 2 Executive summary

Methods

The findings in this report are based on a combination of survivor testimony elicited through qualitative interviews, direct observation, analysis of contemporary written accounts including medical records, institutional and NGO reports, evidence collected by the Rojava Information Center (**RIC**), and open-source material. The report treats each source according to its evidential weight. Detail of the methods used is set out in Part 4 of the report. The anonymised list of interviewees at Appendix III explains the status of each of the participants. The applicable law is set out at Part 5 of the report. The standard of proof applied throughout the report is “**reasonable grounds to believe**” the violation is made out on the evidence examined.

Summary findings

Attacks on civilians

In January 2026, attacks on civilians occurred in two main settings: the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo, and on the roads out of Tabqa and Raqqa. The evidence indicates that civilians were exposed to drone strikes, artillery, sniper fire, shootings at vehicles, violence at checkpoints, and attacks on areas where civilians had gathered for safety. In Aleppo, civilians were affected by siege conditions and direct attacks on homes, streets, and hospitals. On the roads out of Tabqa and Raqqa, witnesses described civilians being shot at, stopped, searched, robbed, detained, and killed. There are reasonable grounds to believe that civilians were deliberately and indiscriminately attacked, and that these acts amounted to serious violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes.

Attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel

The evidence reviewed by the FFT reflects a consistent pattern of attacks on hospitals and medical personnel, along with the obstruction of access to medical care. In Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah the evidence indicates that Khaled Fajer Hospital and Osman Hospital were attacked directly by shelling. Medical staff were wounded, detained, disappeared, and killed. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel were not isolated incidents, but part of a wider pattern in which protected medical

infrastructure and personnel were placed at risk or directly targeted, contrary to the protections afforded by international humanitarian law, and that these acts amounted to war crimes.

Arbitrary deprivation of liberty

The FFT identified a pattern of detention, disappearance, and attempted detention following the takeover of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah and at checkpoints on routes used by civilians fleeing violence. Survivor accounts describe men being separated from women and children, detainees being taken to overcrowded facilities, and detainees being held without information being provided to families. Detainees described beatings, electric shocks, blindfolding, handcuffing, forced confessions, inadequate food and water, poor hygiene, and lack of access to medical care. There are reasonable grounds to believe that persons were deprived of their liberty without legal safeguards and were subjected to treatment inconsistent with international humanitarian law, and that these acts amounted to war crimes of arbitrary detention, cruel treatment, torture, enforced disappearance, or hostage-taking. There are also reasonable grounds to believe that, insofar as the relevant contextual elements were present, these acts amounted to crimes against humanity.

Outrages on personal dignity

The FFT has seen serious and disturbing evidence of humiliating and degrading treatment of both the living and the dead. Detainees described inhuman and degrading conditions of detention. Witnesses described desecration of bodies, mutilation, public filming and circulation of degrading images, obstruction of dignified burial, and humiliation of families attempting to recover the remains of relatives. The FFT has reviewed direct photographic evidence of mutilation of bodies. The evidence included the cutting of women's hair or braids, the cutting of tattoos from bodies, the removal of body parts, and the public display or abuse of the dead. These acts were often accompanied by racist, sectarian, and gendered insults. There are reasonable grounds to believe that this conduct was intended to degrade, intimidate, and humiliate victims, families, and communities, and that these acts amounted to the war crime of outrages upon personal dignity, including humiliating and degrading treatment.

Attacks on members of armed forces not taking an active part in hostilities

Following interviews with released detainees, the FFT has documented evidence that members of the asayish and SDF were mistreated and killed after they had been captured or otherwise placed hors de combat. Asayish members described being blindfolded, handcuffed, beaten, subjected to electric shocks, forced to strip, forced to wear prison clothing, interrogated, and denied proper medical care. The FFT also received evidence of wounded persons being mistreated, detained persons being coerced into confessions, and fighters and security personnel being executed or being mutilated after capture or death. There are reasonable grounds to believe that murder, torture, and cruel treatment of such persons amounting to war crimes has occurred.

Pillage

The FFT recorded widespread evidence of looting and destruction of private property and institutions. Interviewees provided evidence of homes being entered, looted, occupied, vandalised, or marked as belonging to armed groups or authorities. Detainees described phones, money, identity documents, wallets, clothing, and other personal belongings being confiscated and not returned. Displaced persons described returning, or attempting to return, to find locks changed, homes emptied, belongings stolen, and property controlled by armed factions or persons linked to them. The FFT also recorded evidence of attacks on institutions dedicated to education, history, culture, and women's public life, including centres and libraries associated with women's organisations. There are reasonable grounds to believe that property was not merely damaged as a by-product of fighting, but was deliberately appropriated, destroyed, or repurposed, with this amounting to acts of pillage as a war crime. Acts of pillage have been so widespread that there are reasonable grounds to believe that pillage amounted to a tolerated practice. Further, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the pillage of mobile phones that could be used to document crimes occurred in order to facilitate a culture of impunity among forces linked with the STG.

Displacement

The FFT recorded evidence of large-scale displacement from Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafiyah, Raqqa, and Tabqa. Many displaced persons were Kurdish civilians who had already experienced earlier displacement, especially from Afrin, and were displaced again in January 2026. Displaced

families were housed in inadequate conditions despite the best efforts of local authorities receiving them. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the displacement amounted to forced displacement as a war crime and, insofar as the relevant contextual elements were present, deportation or forcible transfer of population as crimes against humanity.

Gender-based rights violations

The violations documented in this report had a distinct gendered dimension. Women were targeted because of their gender. The evidence collected and reviewed by the FFT included threats against women in public institutions, publication of personal information, attacks on women's centres, libraries, and symbols, and the destruction or closure of institutions associated with women's political and cultural participation. The evidence also indicates that gendered attacks occurred on bodies and dignity, including the desecration of women fighters' bodies. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the gendered dimension of the crimes detailed in this report constituted adverse distinction, amounting to a breach of international humanitarian law. There are also reasonable grounds to believe that, where the contextual elements were present, gendered targeting meant that the violations detailed in this report amounted to persecution on the grounds of gender, constituting a crime against humanity.

Terminology used

North and East Syria is home to a diverse range of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities who have coexisted for centuries. In Kurdish, the region is commonly referred to as Rojava, although different names are used depending on the language, political context, and the preferences of those speaking. Likewise, places and organisations may be known by multiple names. The individuals interviewed by the FFT came from diverse backgrounds and were interviewed in either Arabic or Kurmanji Kurdish. This sometimes meant that the same locations were described using different terminology. Even when a consistent name was given for the same location, multiple pronunciations or spellings exist. For example, the city located at the confluence of the Khabur River and the Jaghjagh River can be referred to as Al-Hasakah in Arabic, Hesekê and Hesîçe in Kurdish, or Hasakah or Heseke in English. Key place names referred to in this report are listed in Appendix II.

In preparing this report, the FFT has had to make decisions about what terms to use. Where official terms exist in English, the FFT has used those terms. For example, the term "Syrian

Democratic Forces” or “SDF” is used in place of the local Arabic, Kurdish, or Syriac terms. However, where a term does not have an official English version, the FFT has chosen to use the term most commonly used by interviewees, while also noting any alternative names that were used in the source data for the report, and to provide a transliteration into English. This ensures a consistent approach across the report, allowing the reader to understand where multiple events have occurred at the same location. In making this choice, the FFT does not seek to determine a “correct” name for the places and organisations referred to in the report, but instead to recognise the validity of the plurality of opinions that exist.

Part 3 Background

History of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

The Syrian Civil War began in 2011. In the early stages, forces affiliated with the government of Bashar al-Assad withdrew from certain Kurdish-majority areas in the north. Around the same time, the Kurdish-led People's Protection Forces (**YPG**) and Women's Protection Forces (**YPJ**) were founded in these areas. On the night of 18 July 2012 Kurdish armed forces took control of the entry and exit routes of the city of Kobani. In the following days, direct Syrian government control ended in several northern cities and regions, including Afrin and Jazira. The people of the area began a degree of self-government as an entity known as "Rojava", which can be translated to English as "Western Kurdistan". Three principal cantons were declared in 2014: Afrin, Kobani, and Jazira.

Over time the name and territorial extent of this self-governing administration changed. In due course it came to be known as the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, and most recently the Democratic Autonomous Administration of the North and East Syria Region (**DAANES**). At its greatest extent, it exercised influence over approximately one third of Syria's territory and had a population of several million. This area did not consist solely of Kurdish-majority border towns; Raqqa, Tabqa, and certain Arab-majority parts of Deir ez-Zor also came under DAANES control.

Local councils, municipalities, justice institutions, internal security organisations, and economic institutions operate in practice. The administration states that it is based on male-female co-chairing in public office, participation through local councils, and representation of Kurds, Arabs, Syrians, Armenians, Turkmen, Yazidis, and other communities.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (**SDF**) was established in 2015 as a coalition of military forces opposed to the Assad regime, ISIS, Turkish-backed factions, and jihadist groups. The YPG and YPJ constituted the military backbone of this coalition, while various Arab, Syriac, and other local armed forces also joined the structure. With the fall of Baghouz in March 2019, ISIS's last major territorial control in Syria came to an end. Thereafter, the SDF's role shifted from front-line warfare to internal security, combating ISIS cells, and guarding prisons and camps holding thousands of ISIS members and affiliates.

The DAANES is not internationally recognised as an independent state. It has not declared secession from Syria or the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. However, it is an institutionalised de facto administration performing state-like administrative functions in the areas it controls. The model it advocates is a decentralised, multi-ethnic and autonomous administrative system within Syria's territorial integrity.¹

Principal armed forces on the ground

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The **SDF** was the largest local military coalition in north-eastern Syria. Although it comprised Kurdish, Arab, and Syriac forces, YPG cadres had a pronounced weight within its command structure.

The **YPG** was initially established to protect Kurdish-majority areas. Following the establishment of the SDF, it became its principal component. Turkey considers the YPG to be the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers Party (**PKK**). The PKK is proscribed in Turkey and some other countries as a terrorist organisation, having fought a decades-long war against the Turkish state. The YPG and DAANES reject the allegation that they are PKK organisations and describe themselves as separate, Syria-based structures. The legal and organisational nature of this relationship was one of the principal points of dispute between Turkey and the SDF's Western partners.

The **YPJ** is an armed force composed of women fighters. It operated within the SDF system. It gained international visibility through the defence of Kobani and other operations against ISIS.

The **asayish** is the DAANES's internal security organisation. Unlike the SDF, it carries out everyday public-order duties, checkpoint operations, criminal investigations, and urban security functions. It has acted jointly with the SDF in certain internal security operations against ISIS cells but it is an independent organisation.

¹ 'DAANES' Social Contract, 2023 Edition' (Rojava Information Center, 14 December 2023) <<https://rojavainformationcenter.org/2023/12/aanes-social-contract-2023-edition/>>.

Syrian National Army

The Syrian National Army (**SNA**) was a loose armed coalition composed largely of former Free Syrian Army groups. Turkey provided SNA groups with weapons, salaries, training, logistical support, and operational coordination. SNA factions were used as front-line forces during Turkish-backed operations and, following those operations, divided among themselves the administration of neighbourhoods, villages, checkpoints, detention centres, and economic resources. SNA factions included the **Hamza Division**, the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as the Sheikh Suleiman Shah Division or “**Amshat**”), and the **Sultan Murad Division** which was composed predominantly of Syrian Turkmen fighters. The **SNA Military Police** was established in 2018 and maintained close links to Turkey.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (**HTS**) was a Sunni Islamist political and paramilitary group formed from the merger of several other groups. One of its predecessor organisations, Jabhat Al-Nusra, had been the Syrian affiliate of Al-Qaeda. It was based in the area of Idlib, in Northwestern Syria, where it established the Syrian Salvation Government.

The leader of HTS, Ahmed Al-Sharaa, was known by the *nom de guerre* Abu al-Jolani.

The events leading to January 2026

Change of administration in Damascus

In November 2024 an offensive was launched by HTS and Turkish-backed opposition armed groups, which culminated on 8 December 2024 in the collapse of the Assad administration. The new transitional administration led by Ahmed al-Sharaa assumed power in Damascus. It came to be known as the Syrian Transitional Government (**STG**).

The new administration’s objective of reuniting Syria as a centralised state does not fully correspond with DAANES’s demand for autonomy. Significant disputes arose regarding the integration of the SDF and local administrations into the centralised state apparatus. These disputes included the distribution of oil and gas revenues; control of border crossings; the constitutional status of Kurds and other minorities; language of education and cultural rights; the justice system; and the system of women and men co-chairing.

The agreements of March and April 2025

On 10 March 2025 SDF Commander-in-Chief Mazlum Abdi and STG President Ahmed al-Sharaa signed an integration agreement. It provided for the integration of the SDF and civilian institutions into the state institutions. The form that the integration would take remained subject to implementation negotiations.

On 1 April 2025 an agreement was signed between the General Council of the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods and a committee appointed by the STG. The agreement envisaged the preservation of local security autonomy, with the asayish retaining control over the neighbourhoods alongside General Security forces affiliated with the Ministry of Interior. Principal checkpoints were to be operated through a joint or coordinated security mechanism. Rather than being dissolved immediately, existing local autonomous civilian institutions were permitted to work in coordination with the Aleppo Governorate and municipal institutions.

Since the military withdrawal and security provisions of the agreement directly concerned the SDF, the agreement constituted the first concrete implementation in Aleppo of the Damascus-SDF agreement of 10 March 2025. On 4 April 2025 the first contingent of SDF-affiliated forces began withdrawing from Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah to SDF-controlled areas east of the Euphrates. On 9 April 2025 a second SDF convoy left the neighbourhoods, under the supervision of the Syrian Ministry of Defence and General Security forces.

From the Agreements to the events of January and February 2026

In summer 2025, the 10 March 2025 integration agreement remained on paper only. While the STG demanded the SDF's complete integration into the army, the SDF advocated preserving local autonomy and its own command structure. Tensions progressively increased on the border between DAANES-controlled and STG-controlled areas.

In September 2025 there were reports of the first serious violations. On 22 September 2025 the asayish announced that "undisciplined groups" affiliated with the STG Ministry of Defence had attempted to attack Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah. Following this incident, there were tensions involving the downing of drones and checkpoints. On 23 September 2025 artillery fire and drone attacks were reported near Deir Hafer, in the area between Aleppo and the Euphrates which was at the time under DAANES administration.

From **1 to 5 October 2025** SDF and pro-STG forces clashed in the areas of Tishrin Dam, Deir Hafer, and roads leading to Raqqa. On **6 October 2025** an explosion occurred in Ashrafiyah; STG forces then closed roads leading to Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah, placing them under de facto siege. On **7 October 2025** a ceasefire was negotiated.

Throughout late **October and November 2025** sporadic clashes occurred in the region of Deir-ez-Zor and the Raqqa countryside.

On **5 January 2026** integration implementation talks between the STG and SDF were interrupted.

On **5 and 6 January 2026** US-mediated negotiations took place between STG and Israeli officials in Paris.

On **6 January 2026** STG and Turkish officials met in Paris. On the same date clashes intensified around Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah, giving rise to the events of January and February 2026 dealt with in this report.

On **13 January 2026** the STG launched a broader north-eastern operation against the SDF. Its initial focus was the eastern Aleppo, Deir Hafer, and Maskanah line. On 17 January 2026 the operation spread to the governorates of Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Hasakah. In Deir ez-Zor, tribal elements and pro-STG forces exerted pressure on the SDF.

On **18 January 2026** a new ceasefire and integration framework was announced. Under this framework, the integration of the SDF into the Syrian state, the transfer of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor to the STG administration, and the reorganisation of critical areas such as border crossings, oil fields, and ISIS camps were placed on the agenda.

On **20 January 2026** the STG announced a new ceasefire and promised not to enter the centres of Hesekeh and Qamishlo.

On **30 January 2026** the STG and SDF reached a more comprehensive agreement. This agreement envisaged the SDF's gradual military and administrative integration, mutual withdrawal from front lines and the entry of Ministry of Interior forces into certain Kurdish-majority cities. Sporadic clashes continued for some time thereafter.

Part 4 Methods and methodology

Overview

The evidence base for this report comes from several distinct sources, which can be categorised as follows:

- (1) Qualitative interviews;
- (2) On-the-ground observation of the living and working conditions in NES;
- (3) Review of contemporaneous written accounts including medical records;
- (4) Review of publicly available reports produced by the institutions of the DAANES and NGOs;
- (5) Review of the detailed evidence underlying reporting by RIC, an independent, volunteer-staffed organisation based in NES; and
- (6) Review of open-source material documenting crimes.

Each of these sources of evidence is dealt with in further detail below. Multiple sources have been cross-referenced with each other where possible in this report.

The FFT's work in NES was grounded in the principles and guidance contained in the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death² and the Istanbul Protocol Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.³

In line with international standards, including the processes adopted by the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic,⁴ the standard of proof for

² United Nations, *The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death 2016: The Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions* (UN 2018).

³ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (Rev. 2, United Nations 2022).

⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic' (2011) A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1 para 5.

ascribing a human rights or humanitarian law violation has been deemed met when there were reasonable grounds to believe that incidents occurred as described.

An incident has been treated as meeting this standard where a reliable body of evidence, consistent with other available information, indicates that it occurred. Patterns identified in the report have been regarded as established only where a series of incidents unfolded over time, involving the same perpetrators and exhibiting shared features, so that a corroborated pattern of conduct could be established.

Qualitative interviews

The FFT conducted 32 detailed qualitative interviews in the 3 tranches described below. A total of 62 people participated. 25 of the interviews were with individual survivors. 1 of the interviews was with a family of survivors. 6 of the interviews were with multiple representatives of institutions or organisations involved in assisting survivors or documenting the aftermath of violations.

First tranche: DAANES institutions and civil society organisations

In the first tranche, the FFT conducted interviews with institutions of the DAANES and other organisations. In particular, the FFT interviewed management of the Heseke Hospital and the Qamishlo Military Hospital about the patients received at the hospitals, the care that was provided, and the documentation of that care. The FFT also interviewed representatives of the Social Justice Council of the Jazira Region; representatives of institutions representing displaced people; and representatives of civil society organisations involved in documenting violations: Synergy/Hevdestî, Legal Defence Initiative, the Union of Lawyers in NES, the Human Rights Assembly of Afrin, and the Jineoloji Academy Rojava. Interviews with these participants were arranged with the assistance of the Foreign Relations Department of the DAANES.

Second tranche: victims and witnesses

In the second tranche, the FFT conducted detailed qualitative interviews with victims and witnesses of the events of January to February 2026. The interviews ranged in length from approximately 20 minutes to approximately 3 hours. Initial interviews were generally longer

than later interviews, allowing initial interviewees to provide rich qualitative data, and for the FFT in later interviews to focus on the most relevant parts of the interviewees' accounts.

Interviews were conducted in Kurmanji Kurdish or through qualified English-Kurmanji or English-Arabic interpreters. Two interviews were conducted by telephone; all others were conducted face-to-face.

Second tranche interviews were arranged through first tranche institutional actors and civil society organisations. Displaced people whose testimony the FFT took were invited by the councils of their home areas, which continued to operate having themselves been displaced to Qamishlo. Displaced people residing in a school were interviewed based on availability and willingness when the FFT visited their accommodation. Interviews with members of the autonomous women's movement were arranged through the DAANES women's institutions. There was a degree of snowball sampling which resulted from participants indicating that their friends or relatives could also give relevant information and introducing them to the FFT.

Third tranche: victims and witnesses who became available later

A third tranche of qualitative interviews with victims and witnesses was carried out in late February and early March 2026 in Kurmanji. The interviews in this third tranche were with members of women's structures and individuals who had recently been released from STG detention. These interviews were arranged with the assistance of DAANES representatives.

Considerations applicable to all interviews

All qualitative interviews were undertaken according to the principle of "do no harm". Guided by this and given ongoing safety concerns, interviewees' names and other identifying information are not included in this report save where expressly requested. At the start of all interviews the purpose of the FFT's work was explained. Detailed discussions of consent ensured: (1) interviewees were content to be interviewed; (2) interviewees had control over the level of anonymisation of their accounts; and (3) interviewees had control over the extent to which their accounts could be used, including for this report and in other fora. Interviews were video or audio recorded where interviewees gave consent to this. Where interviewees did not consent to recording, interviews were contemporaneously recorded in writing. Transcripts of the interviews were prepared in-country. At the end of each interview the FFT reiterated the consent discussion. Consent was contemporaneously recorded.

On-the-ground observation of the living and working conditions in NES

In the course of their delegation to NES, the FFT were able to observe first-hand the living and working conditions in NES at the time. This included meeting local councillors and members of judicial and women's institutions in their workplaces, visiting hospitals, visiting homes, and visiting schools serving as emergency accommodation for displaced people.

Forensic medical expert analysis

Interviews were conducted with the administrations of Qamishlo Military Hospital and Heseke Hospital. Additionally, interviews were held with the directors of the various medical units within the military hospital. The investigation also included visits to, and interviews with, patients receiving treatment during the FFT's inquiry.

Medical records were shared by the hospitals and were transcribed and translated from Arabic to English. A review was conducted of the translated medical records. These records were examined alongside photographs of the victims taken during their hospital treatment, allowing for cross-referencing between documentary and visual evidence.

This was supplemented by physical examinations of individual witnesses interviewed by the FFT, along with an analysis of their accounts and medical records.

Furthermore, the investigation analysed audiovisual material provided to the FFT, including footage of dead bodies and images of mutilated corpses. The FFT also analysed open-source evidence collated by RIC, utilising specific analytical methods to process these materials.

Review of publicly available reports

The FFT has reviewed reports by the DAANES institutions and local NGOs. In NES the FFT met with representatives of organisations engaged in collecting evidence of violations and received copies of reports prepared by Synergy/Hevdestî,⁵ the Jineoloji Academy Rojava,⁶ and

⁵ Synergy Hevdestî, 'From Aleppo to Al-Hasakah: Civilians Caught Between Bombardment Disappearances and Attacks on Dignity and Identity' (2026) <<https://hevdesti.org/en/jan2026-escalation-in-northeastern-syria-civilian-harm-from-aleppo-to-alhasakah/>>.

⁶ Jineoloji Academy Rojava, 'War Crimes in North and East Syria' (2026) <https://womendefendrojava.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/War_Crimes_in_North_and_East_Syria_-_Jineoloji_Academy_-_January_2026.pdf>.

the DAANES.⁷ Where reports originate from organisations that are related to a party to the conflict, the FFT has not treated them as providing independent evidence, but as highlighting the existence of additional testimony which may be capable of corroborating the first-hand accounts of witnesses interviewed by the FFT. Where the FFT have drawn supporting factual evidence from third-party reports this should not necessarily be taken as an endorsement of the legal analysis contained in those reports.

Review of evidence collected by the Rojava Information Center (RIC)

RIC is an independent media organisation based in NES. It is made up of local staff and international volunteers. During their time in NES, the FFT spoke in detail to RIC about the evidence they had collected and their data collection techniques. The FFT were provided with access to RIC's databases containing the detailed evidential basis for RIC's report on the assault on NES.⁸ These databases cross-reference publicly available information documenting violations, which the FFT have in turn reviewed.

Review of open-source material documenting crimes

Several interviewees referred to, or provided to the FFT, open-source material documenting crimes they witnessed or were directly affected by. Reports produced by institutions linked to the DAANES and by NGOs also provide references in the form of open-source material. The FFT has also had access to open-source material referred to by RIC in their databases. The FFT has cross-checked their own research with this open-source material.

⁷ Elham Ahamd, 'Documentation of Recent Violations in Aleppo' (Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria 2026); 'File of Violations Against Rojava' (2026); Department of Foreign Relations of North and East Syria, 'Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah Neighbourhoods under Violations' (2026).

⁸ Rojava Information Center, 'The Assault on North and East Syria: Violations During SAA' January 2026 Offensive'.

Part 5 Applicable law

This report analyses the events of January and February 2026 through the lenses of war crimes and crimes against humanity. In this section the most relevant legal principles are summarised.

Key points on the applicable law

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provides protections to everyone affected by armed conflict.

The events of January and February 2026 were a non-international armed conflict (NIAC).

Violations of IHL which occurred during January and February 2026 can constitute war crimes.

Conduct during the events of January and February 2026 can also constitute crimes against humanity.

International Humanitarian Law and War Crimes

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is the *lex specialis* applicable during armed conflicts. It provides specific guarantees for those involved in and affected by armed conflict and regulates parties' conduct. At the same time, its specific nature provides a derogation from the general principles of International Human Rights Law (IHRL), the *lex generalis* which applies outside the context of armed conflict. Where violations of IHL occur, such violations may amount to war crimes.

Sources of International Humanitarian Law

There are 3 sources of IHL: treaties, custom, and the general principles of law. The last of these has a limited role,⁹ and does not feature in our analysis.

Treaty-based IHL derives from international agreements between states. Modern treaty IHL is primarily found in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols. The applicability of IHL rules derived from treaties is generally limited to the territory and actions of states which are signatories. 196 states have ratified the four Geneva Conventions of 1949.

⁹ Nils Melzer, *International Humanitarian Law: A Comprehensive Introduction* (ICRC 2019) 24 <<https://library.icrc.org/library/docs/DOC/icrc-002-4231.pdf>>.

Those 196 states include all states involved in the events of January and February 2026 in NES. A more limited number of states have ratified the Additional Protocols.

Article 3 of each of the four 1949 Geneva Conventions (**Common Article 3**) provides the relevant treaty law basis of IHL applicable to the events of January and February 2026 in Syria as a Non-International Armed Conflict (**NIAC**), as set out below. The Second Additional Protocol (**APII**) provides further IHL treaty law relevant to non-international armed conflicts. However, APII is not directly applicable in Syria because the Syrian Arab Republic is not a party to it.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (**ICC**) defines the crimes falling within the jurisdiction of the ICC. The Elements of Crimes, adopted pursuant to Article 9 of the Rome Statute, provides legal definitions for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression. By defining certain war crimes, the Rome Statute provides a further treaty basis for IHL obligations by evidencing international consensus concerning serious violations and setting out definitions relevant to customary IHL.

Treaty IHL is supplemented by customary IHL, which is derived in large part from the customs of states as well as the provisions of treaty IHL which have not been signed by the Syrian Arab Republic, including APII. Customary IHL is binding on all parties to a conflict regardless of whether they have signed treaties. The International Committee of the Red Cross (“**ICRC**”) is the custodian of IHL. It maintains an online database of Customary IHL.¹⁰ This database derives from a comprehensive study published in 2005,¹¹ which has been constantly updated to reflect contemporary practice and sources. Given the role of the ICRC as custodian of IHL, in analysing customary IHL this report relies heavily on the ICRC database as the most widely used and influential synthesis of customary IHL.

¹⁰ ICRC, ‘Customary IHL - IHL Databases - ICRC’ <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl>>.

¹¹ Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck (eds), *Customary International Humanitarian Law* (2009 reprint with corrections, Cambridge University Press 2005).

The existence of an armed conflict

An armed conflict will exist where there is a situation in which organised parties confront one another with violence of a certain degree of intensity. These are factual matters which need to be decided in light of the particular evidence and on a case-by-case basis.¹²

Comprehensive guidance on the level of parties' "organisation" has been provided by international tribunals. State armed forces can be presumed to be organised.¹³ For a non-state armed group to be "organised", international tribunals have identified indicative factors, which include: (1) a command structure and disciplinary rules and mechanisms within the group; (2) a headquarters; (3) control of territory; (4) access to weapons, equipment, recruits, and military training; (5) the ability to plan, coordinate, and carry out military operations, including troop movements and logistics; (6) the ability to define a unified military strategy and use military tactics; and (7) the ability to speak with one voice and negotiate and conclude agreements such as ceasefires and peace accords.¹⁴ The first factor has been considered to be tied to the ability of the armed group to "implement the basic obligations of Common Article 3".¹⁵

Article 1(2) of APII provides guidance on the degree of intensity of hostilities which must be met for an armed conflict to exist, stating this designation "shall not apply to situations of internal disturbances and tensions, such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence and other acts of a similar nature, as not being armed conflicts". Although APII and Common Article 3 are distinct, the former provides an interpretive guide to the latter. Moreover, Article 8(2)(d) of the Rome Statute of the ICC provides for its jurisdiction in respect of serious violations of Common Article 3 in identical wording to that contained in APII, which demonstrates a consistent threshold for intensity of hostilities required by Common Article 3 and APII.

Again, indicative factors have been developed by international tribunals to assist in the determination of whether hostilities have reached the required degree of intensity to be classified as an armed conflict. In summary, these include (1) the seriousness of attacks and

¹² See e.g. *Rutaganda Trial Judgment* ICTR ICTR-96-3-T, 6 December 1999 [92]; *Limaj Trial Judgment* ICTY IT-03-66-T, 30 November 2005 [84]; *Boškoski and Tarčulovski Trial Judgment* ICTY IT-04-82-T, 10 July 2008 [175].

¹³ *Haradinaj Trial Judgment* ICTY IT-04-84-T, 3 April 2008 [60].

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *Boškoski and Tarčulovski Trial Judgment* (n 12) para 202.

whether there has been an increase in armed clashes; (2) the spread of clashes over territory and over a period of time; (3) any increase in the number of government forces and mobilisation and the distribution of weapons among both parties to the conflict; and (4) whether the conflict has attracted the attention of the UN Security Council, and whether any resolutions on the matter have been passed.¹⁶ Further, the way that a state resorts to force in dealing with armed groups may indicate that an armed conflict exists, given the more permissive assessments of the right to use force involved in IHL as compared to IHRL.¹⁷

Where an armed conflict exists, IHL applies from its initiation and extends beyond the cessation of hostilities until a general conclusion of peace is reached.¹⁸

The classification of the events of January and February 2026 as a NIAC

IHL recognises 2 distinct types of armed conflict: International Armed Conflicts (**IACs**) and Non-International Armed Conflicts (**NIACs**). Different rules apply to IACs and NIACs. The rules applicable to IACs are more formalised and detailed than those applicable to NIACs. A NIAC exists where there is protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organised armed groups or between such groups within a State.¹⁹

There are two circumstances in which a conflict can be characterised as an IAC. The first, and most common, is where hostilities take place between two or more States, as provided for by Common Article 2 of the Geneva Conventions. The second arises under Article 1(4) of Additional Protocol I (**API**), which extends the rules applicable to IACs to certain wars of national liberation, namely situations in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation or against racist régimes in the exercise of their right to self-determination, as recognised in the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant principles of international law.

The events of January and February 2026 took place exclusively on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. They did not involve armed conflict between states or the occupation of the territory of one state by another. They involved conflict between the STG forces and allied militias on one side, and organised forces associated with the DAANES on the other.

¹⁶ *ibid* 177.

¹⁷ *ibid* 178.

¹⁸ *Tadić Decision on the Defence Motion for Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction* ICTY IT-94-I, 2 October 1995 [70].

¹⁹ *ibid*.

The armed forces of the DAANES involved in the conflict were Syrian. The position in respect of STG-allied forces is more complex. In qualitative interviews, witnesses repeatedly mentioned “ISIS sleeper cells”, particularly in the area to the east of the Euphrates between Tabqa and Heseke.²⁰ These “ISIS sleeper cells” were said to be composed of local Arab Syrian citizens with tribal affiliations, acting in coordination with the STG. However, there is also significant evidence from multiple sources that armed forces under the effective control of the STG during the events of January and February 2026 included non-Syrians.²¹ Some interviewees mentioned the presence of non-Syrian members of militias allied to the STG, particularly during the last days of the siege of Sheikh Maqsoud. Others witnessed fighters with the Turkish flag on their uniforms, and using a hand gesture associated with the Grey Wolves, a Turkish far-right political movement.²² There is also evidence of involvement of the Turkish armed forces in support of the STG, in particular through the use of Turkish military personnel, Turkish military equipment and Turkish interrogators.²³

Notwithstanding the presence of foreign participants, the FFT have chosen to analyse the events of January and February 2026 primarily through the framework applicable to NIACs. This does not mean that the possibility of an IAC can be excluded at the outset. In particular, the presence of foreign nationals among the forces involved, the military and political support provided to the STG by other States, and the conduct of forces affiliated with or supporting the STG require consideration. However, none of these circumstances, individually or collectively, is sufficient to internationalise the conflict under IHL. The mere fact that foreign nationals participated in hostilities does not make the conflict international in character. Similarly, external military, political, or logistical support to one party does not, without more, transform a conflict between organised armed parties within one state into an IAC. On the evidence available, the external support documented during the period under review was directed towards the STG and did not result in hostilities being conducted between external supporting states and the SDF, nor does any evidence establish that the SDF was acting as an organ or agent of another State. The overall structure of the conflict also supports its characterisation as non-international. The conflict was fought predominantly over control, security, and political authority within Syrian territory rather than as an armed confrontation

20 Interviews A1, A3, A4, A5, A8, B1, B4, B5, and B6.

21 Interviews A1, A2, A8, X6, X8 and X9.

22 Interviews A1, A8, X6, X8, and X9.

23 Interviews A2, A8, X6, X8, and X9.

between the Syrian state and another state. Foreign involvement did not alter this underlying configuration.

The possibility of an IAC arising on the basis of Article I(4) of API requires separate consideration. International law does not prescribe a specific mechanism by which the right to self-determination must be achieved in all circumstances: the DAANES's non-secessionist model of meaningful political, economic, social, and cultural self-government could constitute a means of realising that right.²⁴ Moreover, the evidence documented by the FFT includes serious instances of ethnic, racial, and sectarian violence committed by forces affiliated with or operating alongside the STG. Witnesses and victims repeatedly described violence against Kurds as being motivated by ethnic identity, including the use of racial epithets and incidents in which Kurds were separated from Arabs, or persons perceived to be Arab, and subsequently subjected to violence.²⁵ The violence that has elsewhere been documented against Druze²⁶ and Alawite²⁷ communities similarly indicates a significant sectarian dimension to the conduct of forces associated with the STG. These patterns are important for assessing the nature of the conflict and demonstrate that the violence cannot exclusively be understood as an ordinary contest for political or territorial control.

Nevertheless, the existence of racist, ethnic, or sectarian violence does not, in itself, satisfy Article I(4) of API. The provision establishes a specific category of conflict in which a people is engaged in a struggle against a racist régime in the exercise of its right to self-determination. The relevant inquiry is therefore not simply whether the authorities or forces opposing the SDF have engaged in discriminatory or racist conduct, but whether the conflict as such was a struggle falling within the scope of Article I(4) of API. On the present evidence, that connection is not sufficiently established. In particular, the available material does not establish that the hostilities during January and February 2026 constituted a collective struggle by a people, acting in that capacity, for the exercise of a right to self-determination within the

²⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 'Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-Operation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations' (1970) Res. 2625 (XXV): 'The establishment of a sovereign and independent State, the free association or integration with an independent State or the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people constitute modes of implementing the right of self-determination by that people.'; *Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965: Advisory Opinion of 25 February 2019* (International Court of Justice) [156–158].

²⁵ Interviews A1, A3, A6, A7, A8, B1, B3, and XI I.

²⁶ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 'International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law Violations Committed during the July 2025 Violence in Suwayda, Syria, 2026.' (United Nations Human Rights Council 2026).

²⁷ *ibid* 22.

meaning of Article I(4) of API. The DAANES has not characterised the hostilities during the period under review in these terms, nor has it presented the conflict as a war of national liberation against a racist régime within the meaning of Additional Protocol I. This does not diminish the significance of the discriminatory and sectarian violence documented, but distinguishes the character of that violence from the separate legal requirements for an Article I(4) IAC.

Accordingly, while the documented ethnic, racial, and sectarian violence is highly relevant to the assessment of the conflict and may warrant further consideration of the framework of Article I(4) of API, the present evidence does not establish the additional legal elements necessary to characterise the conflict as an IAC. As such, the events of January and February 2026 are most appropriately characterised as a NIAC under IHL, albeit this classification could require reassessment if further evidence emerges concerning either the involvement or control of foreign States or the nature of the conflict as a struggle for self-determination under Article I(4) of API.

Relevant law in a NIAC

Common Article 3 applies explicitly to NIACs occurring on the territory of a party to the Geneva Conventions. Common Article 3 establishes the following rules for the conduct of hostilities:

“(1) Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed 'hors de combat' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

To this end, the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

- (a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (b) taking of hostages;
- (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.

(2) The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for.”

Additional Protocol II (**APII**) contains more detailed rules specific to NIACs but has not been ratified by the Syrian Arab Republic. The material field of application of APII is limited to NIACs “which take place in the territory of a High Contracting Party”. As a result, APII is not binding on Syria as treaty law, and its relevance will be limited to the application of some of the principles it contains as customary IHL.

The Rome Statute of the ICC defines specific international crimes arising out of NIACs. This treaty-based law does not in and of itself create specific protections, but its coercive force can be seen to constitute a form of protection for those involved in NIACs, and to provide an interpretive guide to other treaty- and custom-based IHL provisions.

In addition to treaty-based IHL, custom provides significant additional content to IHL principles applicable in NIACs. The ICRC database sets out how this applies in practice.

Categorising those involved in the armed conflict

Given that the events of January and February 2026 constituted a NIAC, those involved in the armed conflict would not be classified as “combatants” under IHL. “Combatant” status provides to participants in conflicts “combatant privilege”. As such, states are hesitant to accord such status to participants in NIACs. “Civilians” who do not engage in hostilities are entitled to the protections accorded to civilians. However, the situation for members of the armed forces who participate in hostilities is more complex. Specific obligations apply to members of the armed forces, and duties may be owed to them.

Members of the SDF provide little difficulty in terms of categorisation. At all relevant times they were members of an organised non-state armed group. The SDF had a command structure and disciplinary rules and mechanisms. It had a headquarters, controlled territory militarily, had access to heavy weapons and equipment, and it recruited and carried out military training. It showed itself capable of planning, coordinating, and carrying out complex military operations, using a unified strategy and tactics. Through its general command and spokespeople, it spoke with one voice and demonstrated, in its negotiations with the STG, the ability to conclude agreements such as ceasefires and peace accords. As such, the SDF constituted an armed force capable of having obligations, and whose members were owed duties, in line with IHL.

The situation for members of the asayish is more complex. The asayish has never been part of the SDF. It is a civilian not a military force. However, in responding to attacks on areas it controlled, particularly in Aleppo, it used small arms. It is a matter of debate whether at any given time it satisfied the indicative criteria to be treated as an armed force. For the purpose of this report's analysis, it has been treated as such in order to clearly distinguish the experiences of asayish members from the experiences of civilians who played no active part in hostilities at any time. In any event, in the context of this report, nothing turns on the classification of asayish members in terms of the duties owed to them because when they participated in hostilities they would not be entitled to protections as civilians, and their status as members of an armed force would not make a difference to the substantive duties of humane treatment owed to them when they no longer participated in hostilities.

Categorisation of war crimes

In this report the FFT have categorised war crimes using the criteria set out in Article 8 of the Rome Statute. The ICC does not currently have jurisdiction to consider crimes committed on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, including the area under the control of the DAANES. Syria is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, and there has been no authorisation from the United Nations to consider crimes committed on its territory. However, this does not change the nature of grave violations of IHL: they remain war crimes, even if there is not currently an international court with jurisdiction to try them. If such an international court or tribunal did emerge in future, the taxonomy of crimes in the Rome Statute would be a lens through which grave violations of IHL could be categorised as specific war crimes. Further, this taxonomy is employed by international investigative bodies such as the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (**the UN Commission of Inquiry**) and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (**the IIM**). It is also useful when considering the application of universal jurisdiction by states, which has become of increasing relevance.

Crimes against humanity

As a matter of customary international law, certain crimes will constitute crimes against humanity when specific “**contextual elements**” are present, as follows: (I) there must have

been an attack; (2) the attack must have been directed against the civilian population (as the primary object of the attack); (3) the attack must be widespread or systematic (albeit that no plan is required); (4) the acts of the perpetrator must form part of the attack; and (5) the perpetrator must know that there is an attack directed against the civilian population and that the perpetrator's acts are part of that attack.²⁸ For the purposes of Article 7(1) of the Rome Statute, which provides a clear treaty basis for an analysis of crimes against humanity, this is expressed as meaning that certain acts “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack” will constitute crimes against humanity.

Article 7(2) limits the type of offences which fall within the jurisdictional scope of the ICC, capturing only a certain type of criminality. It defines an “Attack directed against any civilian population” as requiring “a course of conduct involving the multiple commission of acts referred to in paragraph 1 against any civilian population, pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy to commit such attack”. Whereas this provides a jurisdictional restriction to the ICC, it does not change the nature of the underlying crimes against humanity: crimes against humanity remain crimes against humanity even if they are outside the scope of the ICC.

In terms of a taxonomy of crimes, this report adopts the approach set out in the Rome Statute. These crimes are listed in Article 7(1) as follows:

- “(a) Murder;
- (b) Extermination;
- (c) Enslavement;
- (d) Deportation or forcible transfer of population;
- (e) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law;
- (f) Torture;
- (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity;
- (h) Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender as defined in paragraph 3, or other

²⁸ See e.g. *Prosecutor v Momčilo Perišić*, Judgement ICTY Case No. IT-04-81-T, 6 September 2011 [80–88].

grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph or any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court;

(i) Enforced disappearance of persons;

(j) The crime of apartheid;

(k) Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.”

Conclusion

This report cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of all violations of international law that have occurred. However, where violations can be identified in the evidence gathered by the FFT these are set out thematically in the following parts of the report. The fact that a violation of international law is not listed below should not be taken as meaning that the FFT considered that it did not occur.

Part 6 Attacks on civilians



Relevant law

Key points: the law on attacks on civilians

Anyone not taking an active part in hostilities is entitled to humane treatment.

The **principle of distinction** requires that civilians and civilian objects are never the object of attack.

The **principle of proportionality** means that any expected loss of civilian life and objects must be proportionate to the anticipated military advantage.

The **principle of precautions** means that all feasible precautions must be taken to avoid, and in any event to minimise, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and damage to civilian objects.

Intentionally directing attacks against civilians is a war crime.

Common Article 3 provides the basic treaty law requirement to treat humanely those taking no active part in hostilities. Without prejudice to the broad nature of this protection, Article 3 specifically prohibits: “(a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture; (b) taking of hostages; (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment; (d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted

court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.” An attack against civilians violates Common Article 3 in that it is violence to life and person.

In addition, it is a “cardinal principle” of IHL that “States must never make civilians the object of attack and must consequently never use weapons that are incapable of distinguishing between civilian and military targets”.²⁹ This is the **principle of distinction** which underpins customary IHL on the treatment of civilians.

Customary IHL provides specific protections for civilians. ICRC Rule 1 mandates: “The parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants. Attacks may only be directed against combatants. Attacks must not be directed against civilians.” In the context of a NIAC “combatants” may be interpreted not strictly as in the sense used in an IAC, but as members of organised armed groups and civilians directly participating in hostilities. Rule 5 defines civilians as “persons who are not members of the armed forces”. Pursuant to Rule 6 “Civilians are protected against attack, unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities.”

Customary IHL contains equivalent protections for civilian *objects*. ICRC Rule 7 provides: “The parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilian objects and military objectives. Attacks may only be directed against military objectives. Attacks must not be directed against civilian objects.” Rule 8 defines military objectives as: “limited to those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose partial or total destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage.” Rule 9 defines civilian objects as “all objects that are not military objectives”. Rule 10 provides: “Civilian objects are protected against attack, unless and for such time as they are military objectives”.

In pursuance of the protection of civilians and civilian objects, ICRC Rule 11 prohibits “indiscriminate attacks”. These are defined by Rule 12 as attacks “(a) which are not directed at a specific military objective; (b) which employ a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective; or (c) which employ a method or means of combat the effects of which cannot be limited as required by international humanitarian law; and

²⁹ *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996 [78].

consequently, in each such case, are of a nature to strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction.” As a form of indiscriminate attack, Rule 13 also prohibits area bombardment of “a city, town, village or other area containing a similar concentration of civilians or civilian objects”.

The presence of civilians does not automatically render a location which would otherwise be a military objective immune from attack under IHL. In such cases, regard must be had to the **principle of proportionality** and the **principle of precautions in attack**. ICRC Rule 14 sets out the principle of proportionality as follows:

“Launching an attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated, is prohibited.”

ICRC Rule 15 sets out the principle of precautions in attack as follows:

“In the conduct of military operations, constant care must be taken to spare the civilian population, civilians and civilian objects. All feasible precautions must be taken to avoid, and in any event to minimize, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.”

Subsequent ICRC Rules set out specific steps that armed forces must take to ensure compliance with the principle of precautions in attack: target verification (Rule 16); taking feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of warfare with a view to avoiding loss of civilian life and injury and damage to civilian objects (Rule 17); assessing the expected effects of attack (Rule 18); exercising control during the execution of attacks to allow their cancellation or suspension in the event that it becomes apparent that the target is civilian or the attack would violate the principle of proportionality (Rule 19); giving advance warning to the civilian population unless circumstances do not permit (Rule 20); and selecting between targets to minimise risk to civilian lives and objects (Rule 21).

Murder of those not taking an active part in hostilities is a war crime pursuant to Article 8(2)(c)(i)-I of the Rome Statute. Article 8(2)(e)(i) of the Rome Statute also defines as a war crime “Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities”. In contrast to the position of attacks on civilians, the Rome Statute of the ICC does not define attacks on civilian objects as a war crime in NIACs. However, Article 8(2)(e)(iv) does define as a war crime “Intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic

monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives”; and Article 8(2)(e)(xii) defines as a war crime “Destroying or seizing the property of an adversary unless such destruction or seizure be imperatively demanded by the necessities of the conflict”. This is capable of achieving the same effect of criminalising the targeting of civilian objects which are not military objectives.

Evidence

The evidence of attacks on civilians gathered by the FFT can be divided into two phases: (1) attacks on civilians in Aleppo between 6 and 11 January 2026; and (2) attacks on civilians fleeing Aleppo, Deir Heyfr, Tabqa, and Raqqa towards Heseke city between 10 and 19 January 2026.

Attacks on civilians in Aleppo

Aleppo is the second largest city in Syria. It is divided into many neighbourhoods. The Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood is predominantly Kurdish, and the population of the Ashrafiyah neighbourhood is mixed, with significant Kurdish and Syriac populations. Throughout the Syrian Civil War, both neighbourhoods were component parts of the DAANES, with a significant SDF presence.³⁰ The neighbourhoods enjoyed relative stability under autonomous governance and provided refuge to internally displaced people from other areas of NES, particularly those displaced by the invasion and occupation perpetrated by Turkey and allied militias in Afrin from 2018, and Serekaniye and Tel Abyad from 2019.³¹

As set out in Part 3 of this report, after the fall of the Assad regime, responsibility for the security of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah transferred to the local asayish. On 1 April 2025

³⁰ Rojava Information Center, ‘Explainer: Syrian Transitional Government Assault on Aleppo’s Kurdish Neighborhoods’ (10 January 2026) <<https://rojavainformationcenter.org/2026/01/explainer-syrian-government-assault-on-aleppo-kurdish-neighborhoods/>>.

³¹ Euronews, ‘European Parliament Passes Resolution Demanding Turkey Withdraws Troop’ (15 March 2018) <<https://www.euronews.com/2018/03/15/european-parliament-passes-resolution-demanding-turkey-withdraws-troops-from-syria>>; Amnesty International, ‘Damning Evidence of War Crimes by Turkish Forces and Allies in Syria’ (18 October 2019) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/10/syria-damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-and-other-violations-by-turkish-forces-and-their-allies/>>; United Nations Human Rights Council, ‘Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry’ (2020) A/HRC/43/57 paras 39–40; Khayrallah al-Hilu, ‘The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies’ [2021] Middle East Directions (MED) <<https://doi.org/10.2870/72894>>; The Political Committee in the Syrian Women’s Political Movement, ‘“Operation Peace Spring”: Its Impact on Displaced Persons and Civilians’ (*The Syrian Women’s Political Movement*, 17 October 2023) <<https://syrianwomenpm.org/statements/operation-peace-spring-its-impact-on-displaced-persons-and-civilians/>>; Human Rights Watch, ‘“Everything Is by the Power of the Weapon”: Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria’ (2024) <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/29/everything-power-weapon/abuses-and-impunity-turkish-occupied-northern-syria>>.

an integration agreement between the STG and the local autonomous councils provided for co-operation between STG forces and the local *asayish*.³² Towards the end of 2025 tensions between the STG's armed forces and local *asayish* increased. In the latter part of 2025 STG forces undertook a siege of the neighbourhoods.³³ Interviewees described how food, water, fuel, and electricity were cut off.³⁴

This situation continued until 6 January 2026, at which point open hostilities broke out as the STG and its allied militias sought to seize control of the neighbourhoods in violation of the 1 April 2025 integration agreement. The Ashrafiyah neighbourhood was seized first, followed by Sheikh Maqsoud.

Survivors described indiscriminate drone and artillery attacks on civilian buildings and cars in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah between 6 and 11 January 2026.³⁵ In these indiscriminate attacks, survivors described civilians, including children, being killed and injured.³⁶ These descriptions are corroborated by 3 specific instances on 6 and 8 January 2026 verified by RIC using multiple items of open-source visual evidence of named victims, geolocation, and victim identification by local NGOs.³⁷ The evidence gathered by the FFT also matches information verified by independent human rights organisation Synergy/Hevdestî, that shelling of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah killed at least 45 civilians and wounded more than 120 others, causing widespread destruction to homes and civilian infrastructure.³⁸ Survivors also recounted seeing bodies, including those of children, in the streets; insufficient space in hospitals to store hundreds of bodies; bodies having to be stored in nearby houses; and civilians and medical staff being prevented from retrieving bodies.³⁹

Synergy/Hevdestî reported that the STG provided warning maps of parts of Aleppo that it intended to target. In Synergy/Hevdestî's analysis, this was ineffective: "these maps were

³² Carmen-Cristina Cîrlig, 'Ceasefire Agreement in Northeast Syria' (European Parliamentary Research Service 2026) PE 791.451 4.

³³ Interviews A1, A2, B3, B7, and X1; Syrian Observatory For Human Rights, 'Despite De-Escalation Agreement | Siege Still Imposed on Al-Ashrafiyah and Al-Sheikh Maqsoud Neighborhoods' (8 October 2025) <<https://www.syriahr.com/en/371201/>>; Syrian Observatory For Human Rights, 'Siege on Al-Sheikh Maqsoud and Al-Ashrafiya Neighbourhoods | Checkpoints Reestablished and Prevention of Entry of Fuels in Aleppo' (13 December 2025) <<https://www.syriahr.com/en/374861/>>.

³⁴ Interviews A1, A2, A8, B3, B7, and X1.

³⁵ Interviews A1, A2, B3, B7, and X1.

³⁶ Interviews A1, A2, B3, B7, and X1.

³⁷ RIC cases [2], [3], and [4].

³⁸ Synergy Hevdestî (n 5).

³⁹ Interviews A1, A2, B3, B7, and X1.

neither comprehensible nor practically usable by residents, particularly in light of widespread disruptions to electricity, internet, and telecommunications services in the targeted neighborhoods. Furthermore, the published maps indicated broad targeting zones encompassing multiple residential buildings, thereby effectively placing large numbers of civilians at risk.”⁴⁰

Throughout the STG takeover, witnesses reported continued indiscriminate attacks on civilians, civilian buildings, and cars by the STG and allied forces, with weapons including drones, snipers, bombs, artillery and tanks.⁴¹ A witness involved in the autonomous administration of one of the neighbourhoods at the time of the attacks estimated there were only around 400 asayish members, and that they were not in possession of any heavy weapons.⁴²

On 10 and 11 January 2026 the takeover of Sheikh Maqsoud came to its conclusion in the neighbourhood surrounding the Khaled Fajer Hospital, where civilians gathered to seek shelter from the STG and its allied militias. Civilians were targeted in the street outside the hospital, in the surrounding areas, and in the hospital itself.⁴³

⁴⁰ تآزر - Synergy [@HevdestiSynergy], ‘Synergy Association for Victims Expresses Its Strong Condemnation of the Actions Taken by the Syrian Transitional Government in Publishing What It Termed “Warning Maps” Concurrently with Shelling Operations Targeting the Neighborhoods of #Sheikh_Maqsoud and #Ashrafieh...’ (Twitter, 8 January 2026) <<https://x.com/HevdestiSynergy/status/2009324054725996935>>; Synergy Hevdesti (n 5).

⁴¹ Interviews A1, A2, A8, B3, B7, and X1; Kurdish Front News, ‘Forces Loyal to the Damascus Government Continue to Randomly Bomb the Sheikh Maqsoud Neighborhood.’ (Telegram, 6 January 2026) <<https://t.me/KurdishFrontNews/22013>>; Kurdish Front News, ‘Fwd: Forces Loyal to the Damascus Government Continue to Randomly Bomb the Sheikh Maqsoud Neighborhood.’ (Telegram, 6 January 2026) <<https://t.me/KurdishFrontNews/22014>>; Kurdish Front News, ‘Terrorists of the HTS-Led Syrian Government Continue Indiscriminate Shelling of the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh Neighborhoods Using Heavy Artillery to Target Densely Populated Residential Areas.’ (Telegram, 6 January 2026) <<https://t.me/KurdishFrontNews/22061>>; Syr Doc, ‘Documentation | 6/1/2026 7/1/2026 Large-Scale Heavy Weapons Attack Targets Residential Neighborhoods in Aleppo, Endangering Over 600,000 Civilians’ (Telegram, 7 January 2026) <<https://t.me/Syrdoc/7376>>; Kurdish Front News, ‘A Video from Earlier Today Showing the Indiscriminate Targeting of Sheikh Maqsoud Neighborhood by the Turkey-Backed Terrorists.’ (Telegram, 7 January 2026) <<https://t.me/KurdishFrontNews/22181>>; Kurdish Front News, ‘HTS Militants Are Targeting Residential Areas in Ashrafieh Neighborhood with GRAD Missiles..’ (Telegram, 8 January 2026) <<https://t.me/KurdishFrontNews/22207>>; Kurdish Front News, ‘Atnow Seikh Maqsoud Currently, Attacks by Forces Loyal to the Damascus Government Continue. The Militias, Who Suffered a Major Blow in the Cestolla Region Yesterday, Continue to Bomb Civilian Areas. Many Houses Were Destroyed as a Result of the Attacks.’ (Telegram, 8 January 2026) <<https://t.me/KurdishFrontNews/22219>>; Kurdish Front News, ‘Footage from Aleppo Shows Turkey-Backed Terrorists Randomly Firing at Residential Buildings of Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsoud Neighborhoods.’ (Telegram, 8 January 2026) <<https://t.me/KurdishFrontNews/22328>>.

⁴² Interview A8.

⁴³ Interviews A2, A8, A10, B3, and B7; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 20–21.

Case study: surviving the siege of Sheikh Maqsoud⁴⁴

“I went to visit family in Aleppo, then the attacks began, and I stayed there. The third attack, on 11 January 2026, was the most difficult. Everyone suffered. It was a siege around us – before they attacked there was no food, no water, nothing people needed for life. Many children, old people, and families in winter were under blankets without heaters or food. For 7 days we had no food, electricity, diesel: we could not warm ourselves or eat.

They told us there would be a humanitarian corridor. Told us that in front of the hospital we would wait for the buses. We went there and stayed 6 or 7 hours. In that time they were still attacking us, hitting us, slowly getting closer to us. I saw a pregnant woman hit with shrapnel, a one-year-old child dead. We hid in houses and shops nearby.

While we were in the houses and shops, there were 3 drone attacks, three people were injured, two lightly and one very heavy. I think we left the injured man behind us. Everyone was just trying to save themselves.

About 6 pm we decided to get out to go somewhere safer: we decided to go to the hospital, because it is known around the world that a hospital should be the safest place. We were lowering ourselves, walking slowly, shouting “we are civilians”; at the time hundreds of bullets were flying over our heads. Among hundreds of people, many were injured, so many were shouting in pain.

The hospital was already full with dead or injured. Around 9 to 10 pm they took over the neighbourhood. At that time I was really sick with a virus, my kidney started to hurt so I asked for water, but they had bombed the water tanks; children were crying asking for water but they had cut everything. Suicide drones were hitting the roof. Some parts of the roof were destroyed, falling on the people.

They brought buses nearby. Around 200 metres away around 4,000 to 5,000 fighters were pointing their weapons at us. The fighters spoke with Algerian and Moroccan accents, and others also spoke Turkish. On their uniforms they had the new Syrian flag.

When we went to the buses they were searching us. While searching, they were insulting us, and hitting people with weapons. They said, “you are dogs, from the SDF, we are going to step on you”.

On 11 January 2026, after the takeover of Khaled Fajer Hospital, a military officer currently serving as Internal Security Chief in the Aleppo Governorate, Mohammad Abdul Ghani, along

⁴⁴ Interview A2.

with his assistant Abu Surokhe, were seen by a witness in Khaled Fajer Hospital issuing orders,⁴⁵ and his presence there was corroborated by open-source evidence.⁴⁶

Further detail on attacks on civilians in Aleppo is contained in Part 7 of this report relating to attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel.

Attacks on fleeing civilians

By 11 January 2026, the STG announced its military operation in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah was complete.⁴⁷ STG and aligned forces then advanced east towards areas under DAANES administration including Deir Hafer, Tabqa, and then Raqqa. According to interview data, in the early hours of 16 January 2026 civilians fearing the advance of STG-aligned forces started fleeing in large numbers in a convoy from Tabqa towards Raqqa.⁴⁸ The civilian convoy was shot at between Tabqa and Raqqa.⁴⁹ This followed attacks by STG-aligned forces on Deir Hafer and surrounding areas,⁵⁰ which in turn resulted in the SDF attempting to re-establish a frontline on the Euphrates. Tabqa is to the south of the Euphrates and fell to STG-aligned forces between 17 and 18 January.⁵¹

At the start of the day on 17 January 2026 civilians in Raqqa were not yet affected by the approaching frontline.⁵² Raqqa is on the north bank of the Euphrates, on the far side of the river from the approaching STG-aligned forces. Interviewees indicated that they attended work as normal on 17 January 2026, but that around 16:00 they learned of a lockdown by the internal security of the local autonomous administration.⁵³ Shooting was heard in civilian neighbourhoods⁵⁴ and at least one checkpoint was established in the city by Arab civilians, near

⁴⁵ Interview B3.

⁴⁶ Levant24 [@Levant_24_], 'Colonel Muhammad Abdul Ghani, Head of Internal Security in Aleppo, Oversaw Legal Procedures with SDF Members Captured in al-Ashrafiyah, Affirming Full Adherence to Their Rights under Syrian Law and International Humanitarian Law. He Stated the SDF Offered Only False Promises And' (Twitter, 8 January 2026) <https://x.com/Levant_24_/status/2009388936918126914>.

⁴⁷ Syrian Arab News Agency, 'المتحدث باسم الداخلية: العملية الدقيقة بحيي الأشرافية والشيخ مقصود وصلت لمراحلها الأخيرة' (Interior spokesman: The delicate operation in the neighborhood of Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsoud reached its final stages)' (10 January 2026) <<https://sana.sy/locals/2371230/>>.

⁴⁸ Interviews A3 and B2.

⁴⁹ Interview A3.

⁵⁰ Interviews A4 and A5.

⁵¹ Interview A6.

⁵² Interviews A3, A4, and A5.

⁵³ Interview A4.

⁵⁴ Interviews A4 and A5.

the city's silos.⁵⁵ One civilian interviewee was stopped, insulted and threatened in the street by fighters and witnessed them kill a disabled child.⁵⁶

A combination of the FFT's own interview data, reviews of open-source media, and investigations by RIC and Community Peacemaker Teams (**CPT**) who interviewed witnesses and verified visual evidence, indicates that on 18 January 2026 attacks against civilians in the region of Raqqa became widespread. These attacks against civilians spread to the escape route that civilian convoys used from Raqqa, a route known as "The Abyad Road" or "The White Road". The route of civilian convoys began in Raqqa itself, going in a broadly easterly direction until the outskirts of the town of Al-Karamah, where at a junction (at coordinates 35.877895° N, 39.270246° E) the route went in a northeasterly direction, passing the small village of Sabah al-Khair (at coordinates 36.069218° N, 39.814966° E), and the village of Abu Khashab (at coordinates 35.946443° N, 40.021959° E), before reaching Heseke.

One survivor described fleeing Raqqa with other civilians on 18 January 2026 before being stopped at Al-Karamah checkpoint where they were identified as Kurds. One of their party was dragged out of their vehicle and executed with two other detainees, then the survivors were forced to lie on the ground and were called "Kurdish pigs" while being stepped on and beaten.⁵⁷

Two brothers interviewed by the FFT were injured when STG-aligned factions shot at their civilian convoy near Sabah al-Khair village on 19 January 2026.⁵⁸ The FFT's forensic medical analysis concluded that the brothers' accounts of the attack on their convoy were consistent with: sensitivities revealed by palpation during physical examination; accounts of their symptoms; medical treatment they had received; dressings on their feet; ongoing secretion likely caused by osteomyelitis; and hospital records including X-rays revealing multiple fractures on metatarsal bones and proximal phalanx.

Multiple survivors also independently described a woman passenger in a car who was shot in the head while holding her baby in her arms during the same attack. The woman shortly thereafter died on the way to hospital.⁵⁹ The FFT were provided the name of the victim.

⁵⁵ Interview B1.

⁵⁶ Interview XI I.

⁵⁷ Interview B1.

⁵⁸ Interviews B4 and B5.

⁵⁹ Interviews A3, B4, and B5.

Another interviewee described her 12 civilian family members fleeing Raqqa on 18 January 2026 in a civilian convoy, being stopped by STG-aligned fighters at a checkpoint near Abu Khashab village, identified as Kurdish, then shot. Four adults and two children were killed, and one adult and five children were left severely wounded.⁶⁰

The multiple, detailed, testimonies independently provided to the FFT of similar incidents along the White Road on 18 and 19 January 2026 establish a pattern. Civilians fled in convoys made up of cars, taxis, tractors, and buses.⁶¹ Civilian convoys were shot at, at various points along the road, and people were injured and killed.⁶² Checkpoints were established at various points along the road by fighters aligned with the STG.⁶³ Interviewees often described those fighters as ISIS sleeper cells. The fighters stopped civilian convoys travelling along the White Road. Occupants were questioned on the presence of young men and on their origin and ethnicity.⁶⁴ Kurdish people who were not able to pass as Arab were singled out for mistreatment including being racially abused, stepped on, beaten, shot, and killed.⁶⁵ Survivors described civilians and the wounded being captured and shot dead at close range.⁶⁶ Immediate family members of civilians killed in such incidents described seeing multiple gunshot wounds on their bodies.⁶⁷ Details in the accounts taken are consistent with the conclusions of forensic medical examination as well as evidence in NGO and media reports.⁶⁸

Case study: Escape from Raqqa hidden among corpses

The interviewee (A3) is a mother from Afrin with a young family, who at the time of interview were staying in a school in Qamishlo. They had experienced multiple displacement.

On 16 January 2026 they fled Tabqa, fearing the advance of the STG. Their transport was slow because they were travelling by tractor, which moved at around 20 km/h and was in poor condition. They travelled as part of a large convoy consisting of thousands of civilians, including tractors, taxis, vans, and some people

⁶⁰ Interview A6.

⁶¹ Interviews A3, A4, A5, B4, B5, and X3.

⁶² Interviews A3, A5, and B5.

⁶³ Interviews A5, B1, B2, and X3.

⁶⁴ Interviews B1, A3, A5, A6, and A7.

⁶⁵ Interviews B1 and A6.

⁶⁶ Interviews A5, B1, and X3.

⁶⁷ Interviews A6 and X3.

⁶⁸ Interview A6; RIC cases [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], and [16]; Synergy Hevdestî (n 5) 7–8; Community Peacemaker Teams, 'The Massacre of a Kurdish Family in Rojava' (25 January 2026) <<https://cptik.org/stories-reports-from-rojava/2026/1/25/the-massacre-of-a-kurdish-family-in-rojava>>; Rudaw Media Network, 'Massacre of Kurdish Family on Ceasefire Day Draws Scrutiny to US's New Ally in Damascus' (Rudaw, 25 January 2026) <<https://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/250120264>>; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 21–23.

on foot. However, at certain points only 4 or 5 vehicles were nearby due to the tractor's limited speed.

The journey was extremely difficult, taking place in the winter snows, and was unplanned. During the journey between Tabqa and Raqqa she heard continuous gunfire.

After leaving Raqqa, the convoy continued towards Heseke. There were two separate incidents of shooting between Raqqa and a resting place known as Al-Iraq, located on the road toward Heseke. In these incidents tracer rounds were fired at the civilian convoy. The shooting lasted about 10 minutes at a time, occurring intermittently. During the first incident, a woman in a car ahead of them was shot and killed. The interviewee later observed the aftermath at the rest area: the woman had been holding a child and had sustained a fatal head wound. Other young people in the same car were injured, particularly in their legs. She was able to see these injuries when they all gathered at the rest stop.

The convoy reached the Al-Iraq rest area at approximately 00:00 to 01:00 on 18 January 2026. Upon arrival, they reported to those present that they were carrying many injured and dead people and requested help, but were told that no assistance could be provided. The family's tractor broke down, and so at approximately 04:00 they departed again hidden under blankets among dead bodies being transported to Heseke, to allow them to pass through checkpoints. At 3 separate checkpoints, individuals speaking Arabic with a Syrian accent similar to that in Raqqa and Tabqa asked whether there were any young boys present. She did not see these individuals, as the driver instructed them to remain hidden, but she heard the questions being asked.

Forensic medical analysis of corpses and hospital records

Despite evidential limitations including bodies in advanced stages of decomposition, brief footage, and clothing obscured by wetness or mould caused by melting ice and body fluids, forensic medical analysis of audiovisual evidence of 51 dead bodies provided to the FFT confirmed multiple instances of civilian clothing on corpses, including blue jeans and civilian shirts.

Additionally, the FFT's forensic medical analysis of hospital records from Qamishlo, where many wounded civilians and members of the armed forces were treated, revealed injuries consistent with the attacks described in this section. At least 10 individuals presented with shrapnel injuries, which can result from fragments of the metal casing of bombs (e.g. cubes, spheres, or notched wire) propelled outward by a blast, secondary debris (e.g. rocks, glass, wood, or vehicle parts) fragmented and thrown by explosions, or high-velocity bullets passing through objects (e.g. car doors, windows) and dislodging metal or glass fragments that then

strike individuals. At least 3 patients had second- or third degree burns likely caused by military explosives or secondary causes such as a vehicle or building used for shelter burning. At least 8 individuals were using Ilizarov apparatus for fracture stabilisation, a device typically used for complex, multi-fragmentary fractures where multiple small bone fragments are missing. This is an injury that strongly suggests high-velocity gunshot wounds caused by military rifles. At least 3 patients had to undergo lower limb amputations. The figures from Heseke Hospital on injuries treated due to the attacks reveal the scale of the health impact including on civilians: hundreds of men, women, and children, including elderly men and elderly women, were treated. Treatment was for 2 head, 21 abdomen, 135 leg and arm, 6 arm, and 160 leg injuries.

Analysis

The evidence gathered by the FFT demonstrates that attacks by the STG and allied militias were intentionally directed at civilians not taking any part in hostilities throughout the areas in NES affected by the events of January 2026. The evidence suggests that on many occasions attacks on armed forces were a means by which attacks on civilians could be achieved, the purpose being to kill or displace the civilian population and pillage civilian property.

Attacks on civilians in Aleppo

In the assessment of the FFT the events in Aleppo up to 11 January 2026 demonstrate that serious violations of IHL principles occurred. Acts of bombardment against civilian neighbourhoods were themselves violations of IHL. They also represented a failure to comply with the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions. In particular, the blanket targeting of civilian objects is incapable of allowing an attack to distinguish between legitimate military objectives on the one hand and civilians and civilian objects on the other hand, and is inherently disproportionate. The use of warning maps which could not be easily accessed or understood by the local population and which could not be acted upon in good time does not amount to the taking of precautions. Further, the systematic nature of the targeting of civilian areas by artillery and drone strikes leads the FFT to conclude that the targeting of civilians was itself intentional, and committed with a view to kill or displace the civilian population from the neighbourhood of Sheikh Maqsoud. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the STG removed civilians from Sheikh Maqsoud at the conclusion of hostilities (as explained in Part 12 of this report), and that a significant number of civilians were arbitrarily deprived of their liberty (as explained in Part 8 of this report).

Further in the assessment of the FFT, events in Aleppo on 10 and 11 January 2026 went significantly further and also amounted to serious violations of IHL principles. Indiscriminate targeting which had the inevitable consequence of killing civilians transitioned into the direct targeting of civilians seeking shelter. No precautions have been identified which were intended by the STG to protect civilians. The attacks on 10 and 11 January 2026 in the vicinity of Khaled Fajer Hospital amounted to direct attacks against the civilian population and civilian objects. The presence of a senior STG commander at the Khaled Fajer Hospital immediately after the conclusion of hostilities gives rise to the possibility of the killing of civilians being a concerted command decision.

There are reasonable grounds to believe the actions of the STG and its allied militias on each occasion amount to the war crime of intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities.

Attacks on fleeing civilians

The situation in relation to attacks on civilians fleeing Sheikh Maqoud, Ashrafiyah, Deir Hafer, Tabqa, and Raqqa between 10 and 19 January 2026 is even more stark. The targeting of civilian convoys and the detention, cruel treatment, and killing of unarmed civilians at short range at checkpoints has no conceivable credible military justification. It is a serious violation of IHL principles, in particular the prohibition on targeting civilians and the explicit prohibition of murder contained in Common Article 3. In some cases the motivation for mistreatment and killings appears to have been the Kurdish ethnicity of victims, in violation of the Common Article 3 prohibition on adverse distinction founded on race.

There are reasonable grounds to believe that the actions of the STG's allied militias in this regard therefore amount to the war crimes of murder and intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities.

The existence of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack

As set out in Part 5 of this report, the contextual elements of crimes against humanity require a series of features to be present in order for crimes against humanity to be proved. In this section we address those features. This analysis is adopted in subsequent Parts of this report.

There was an attack. In the events of January to February 2026 there was a cohesiveness between the various criminal acts directed against the civilian population. The events were not merely an accumulation of unrelated, random, or isolated criminal acts. The attacks against civilians were distinct from the armed conflict occurring at the same time, in that the victims of the attack were not participants in the armed conflict and, in many cases as set out in further detail in the later Parts of this report, were in detention at the time that they were the victims of attacks. The attack itself took place over a broad time span and geographical area across Northern Syria.

The attack was directed against the civilian population as the primary object of the attack. As set out in this Part, there are reasonable grounds to believe that attacks on civilians in Aleppo and attacks on fleeing civilians were directed at the civilian population rather than against any legitimate military objectives.

The attack was widespread or systematic. There are reasonable grounds to believe that attacks against civilians in Aleppo were directed as part of the military campaign on a widespread and systematic level. The attacks continued over a significant period of time, all while they were being contemporaneously publicly documented in the media in a manner accessible to perpetrators. The same form of attacks occurring consistently throughout the events in Aleppo, and then a different form of attacks occurring consistently against fleeing civilians, provides reasonable grounds to believe that the attacks were not isolated or random events.

The acts of the perpetrator formed part of the attack, and the perpetrator knew that there was an attack directed against the civilian population and that the perpetrator's acts were part of that attack. The specific perpetrators of the individual actions which constituted parts of the attack are difficult to ascertain. The identities of individuals who are responsible for the attack will in many cases require further investigation.

However, the difficulty in attributing individual responsibility for crimes against humanity at an early stage of investigation does not undermine the finding that there are reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity occurred.

Part 7 Attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel



Relevant law

Key points: the law on attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel

Medical personnel and hospitals are entitled to a **heightened degree of protection**.

They only lose protection insofar as they commit or are used, outside their humanitarian functions, to commit acts harmful to the enemy.

Intentionally directing attacks against hospitals, provided they are not military objectives, amounts to a **war crime**.

Common Article 3 provides implicit protection to medical infrastructure, since attacks on medical infrastructure will generally violate the prohibition on inhumane treatment of those taking no active part in hostilities. Further, Common Article 3 provides explicitly that “The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for.” However, the protections of Article 3 would not apply to those who continue to engage in hostile acts whilst wounded and sick, as their actions would continue to make them a legitimate target of attack.

Customary IHL provides additional protections for medical personnel and infrastructure. ICRC Rule 25 provides that medical personnel exclusively assigned to medical duties must be respected and protected in all circumstances and ICRC Rule 28 provides that medical units (including hospitals) exclusively assigned to medical purposes must be respected and protected

in all circumstances. However, medical personnel and units (including hospitals) lose their protection if they commit or are used, outside their humanitarian functions, to commit acts harmful to the enemy. Acts harmful to the enemy requires something more than the mere presence of wounded members of the armed forces, in possession of small arms and ammunition.⁶⁹ Even if this special protection is lost, the duties of humanitarian treatment in Common Article 3 and the principle of distinction between civilians and participants in hostilities, along with the principle of proportionality in attack, will still apply.

ICRC Rule 109 provides that “Whenever circumstances permit, and particularly after an engagement, each party to the conflict must, without delay, take all possible measures to search for, collect and evacuate the wounded, sick and shipwrecked without adverse distinction”. As taking all possible measures is an obligation of means, it necessarily involves permitting humanitarian organisations to assist in their search and collection. Article 18 of the First Geneva Convention provides that “no one may ever be molested or convicted for having nursed the wounded or sick”. Although this cannot apply directly to a NIAC, it provides an interpretive guide to the means obligation in ICRC Rule 109, in that taking action against those who have nursed the wounded or sick is likely to undermine the taking of all possible measures to collect and evacuate the wounded and sick.

ICRC Rule 110 provides that “The wounded, sick and shipwrecked must receive, to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay, the medical care and attention required by their condition. No distinction may be made among them founded on any grounds other than medical ones.”

“Intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to... hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives” amounts to a war crime pursuant to Article 8(2)(e)(iv) of the Rome Statute.

Evidence

The evidence gathered by the FFT indicates that medical infrastructure and personnel were placed under sustained pressure arising from direct attacks on hospitals and field hospitals; obstruction of medical evacuation; siege conditions affecting access to water, electricity, fuel,

⁶⁹ This can be seen by comparing the situation set out in First Geneva Convention, Article 22; Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 19; and Additional Protocol I, Article 13(2).

and medicine; and the targeting or intimidation of wounded persons and medical staff. The most detailed evidence concerns attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo, although medical institutions in Heseke and Qamishlo were also affected through large-scale patient influxes, shortages, and access restrictions.⁷⁰

Attacks on hospitals in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah

Multiple interviewees described attacks on hospitals or areas immediately surrounding hospitals in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah. The Khaled Fajer Hospital in Sheikh Maqsoud was identified by witnesses as a site where civilians gathered⁷¹ believing it would provide protection “because it is known around the world that a hospital should be the safest place.”⁷² One witness described moving with other civilians towards the hospital while shouting that they were civilians, while bullets continued to pass overhead and wounded people were crying out in pain. Once inside, the hospital was described as full of dead and injured persons. The witness described suicide drones striking the roof, at one stage counting 48 bomb hits at intervals of 30 seconds, parts of the roof falling onto the hundreds sheltering inside, and the hospital’s water supply being unavailable after water tanks were bombed.⁷³

The same account indicates that Khaled Fajer Hospital was functioning in severely degraded conditions. The witness recalled that there were no meaningful medical supplies available, and that one named hospital worker was attempting to provide care and reassurance to the many wounded and sheltering civilians. Children were described as crying for water, and civilians sheltering in the hospital feared the use of suffocating gas, with basic hospital masks being distributed.⁷⁴ Another witness describes Khaled Fajer Hospital being shot at, windows and doors being broken, civilians and the wounded sheltering inside without access to food or water for three days, and staff being killed.⁷⁵ CCTV video footage inside the hospital, verified by RIC through cross-checking visual evidence, geolocation, and identification by local NGOs, shows the moment of impact of a bomb or shell explosion on the hospital, killing two staff members, at 20:09 on 8 January 2026.⁷⁶ Multiple items of audiovisual evidence viewed by the

⁷⁰ Interviews A2, A7, A8, A10, B3, B7, B8, and B9.

⁷¹ Interviews A2 and B3.

⁷² Interview A2.

⁷³ Interview A2.

⁷⁴ Interview A2.

⁷⁵ Interview B3.

⁷⁶ RIC case [3].

FFT and verified by RIC through cross-checking and geolocation show fires in the hospital after strikes.⁷⁷

A further witness, a healthcare worker who continued to care for the wounded at the hospital, described non-stop noises of drones, shooting, the radiology centre being destroyed, a tank hitting the hospital wall, and attacks on water and electric facilities meaning no one in the hospital had food or water for three days. This led to the death of a wounded baby who they could not feed. Attacks on the generators caused the deaths of at least 5 patients in the intensive care unit. The same witness describes carrying 35 wounded patients to a basement surgery and being unable to collect the wounded gathered outside the hospital building.⁷⁸

Institutional interviewees also referred to attacks on hospitals in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah, including Khaled Fajer and Osman Civil Hospital. They described hospitals being bombed, including by drones, and described attacks on medical personnel.⁷⁹ Members of women's institutions involved in documenting events in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Tabqa described hospitals in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah, including Osman Civil Hospital, as having been bombed, and field hospitals being attacked. They also stated that doctors, nurses, cleaners, and other medical staff were killed or wounded during attacks on medical facilities.⁸⁰

The evidence gathered by the FFT indicates that hospitals in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah were not incidentally affected by surrounding hostilities. Rather, multiple accounts describe hospitals as being struck, damaged, deprived of essential supplies, and rendered unable to provide ordinary medical care at precisely the moment that civilians and wounded persons were seeking protection and treatment.⁸¹ Videos, images, and testimonies gathered by RIC and Jineoloji Academy, as well as reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) and UN briefings, corroborate these accounts of attacks on Khaled Fajer Hospital and Osman Civil Hospital.⁸²

⁷⁷ RIC case [4].

⁷⁸ Interview B7.

⁷⁹ Interview A8.

⁸⁰ Interview A10.

⁸¹ Interviews A2, A8, A10, B3, and B7.

⁸² Syrian Observatory For Human Rights, 'Blatant Violation of International Law | Government Forces Attack Surroundings of "Othman" Hospital and Residential Buildings in Aleppo's Neighborhoods' (8 January 2026) <<https://www.syriahr.com/en/376118/>>; Syrian Observatory For Human Rights, 'Putting It out of Service | Four Successive Round of Bombardment Targets "Khalid Fajr" Hospital, Threatening of Humanitarian Disaster' (8 January 2026) <<https://www.syriahr.com/en/376172/>>; United Nations Secretary General, 'Noon Briefing of 8

One witness referred to some asayish members with small weapons being present in or around hospital areas during the final stages of the fighting in Sheikh Maqsoud.⁸³

While the main evidence of attacks on medical infrastructure is from Aleppo, an attack was also documented in the city of Qamishlo. On 20 January 2026 a hospital in Qamishlo was attacked in a drone strike which caused damage to the hospital buildings.⁸⁴ Local authorities attribute responsibility for the drone strike to the Turkish Armed Forces. The FFT have seen evidence of the extent of the damage as contemporaneously documented by RIC.⁸⁵

Killing, wounding, and intimidation of medical personnel

Interviewees repeatedly referenced medical personnel being killed, wounded, or intimidated. One interviewee described the execution of Dr Ednan Arif Osman and Dr Ali Hanif Osman at the Osman Civil Hospital.⁸⁶ This incident is corroborated by civil society reports and a contemporaneous statement by the DAANES health authority.⁸⁷ The interviewee attributed the execution to the Hamza Division and Amshat armed groups. The same witness also described other hospital staff including a nurse, laboratory technician, and cleaner being wounded. Institutional witnesses similarly described medical staff, including a doctor and pharmacist, being shot when armed groups entered or took control of hospital areas, and staff seen to be protecting the facility being shot in the head or eyes.⁸⁸ Hevya Sor (Kurdish Red Crescent) reported on 12 January 2026 that three of its medical staff – an ambulance driver, a paramedic, and a prosthetics department worker – had been detained by STG forces while providing urgent medical care to the wounded in Sheikh Maqsoud⁸⁹ and later reported the

January 2026' (8 January 2026) <<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/highlight/2026-01-08.html>>; Jineoloji Academy Rojava (n 6) 6–7; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 14–15.

⁸³ Interview A2.

⁸⁴ Hevya Sor a Kurd, 'Statement of Condemnation and Denunciation of Attacks on Health Centers and Medical Personnel in Northern and Eastern Syria' (24 February 2026) <<https://hskurd.org/?p=11948&lang=en>>.

⁸⁵ Images supplied by Rojava Information Center, RIC case [19].

⁸⁶ Interview B7.

⁸⁷ Rights Monitor Syria, 'Liquidation of Kurdish Citizens from the Staff of Osman Hospital in the Ashrafiyeh Neighborhood of Aleppo' (9 January 2026) <<https://rightsmonitor.org/liquidation-of-kurdish-citizens-from-the-staff-of-osman-hospital-in-the-ashrafiyeh-neighborhood-of-aleppo/>>; Syrian Observatory For Human Rights, 'Ongoing Violations | Two Staff Members of Othman Hospital Executed in Al-Ashrafiyah Neighborhood in Aleppo' (9 January 2026) <<https://www.syriahr.com/en/376184/>>; ANHA, 'Health Authority Condemns Targeting of Hospitals in Sheikh Maqsoud, Calls for Urgent International Intervention' (ANHA, 10 January 2026) <<https://hawarnews.com/en/health-authority-condemns-targeting-of-hospitals-in-sheikh-maqsoud-calls-for-urgent-international-intervention>>; Jineoloji Academy Rojava (n 6) 9.

⁸⁸ Interview A8.

⁸⁹ RIC case [9]; ANHA, 'Kurdish Red Crescent Calls for Release of Its Kidnapped Staff by Interim Govt.' (ANHA, 12 January 2026) <[https://hawarnews.com/en/kurdish-red-crescent-calls-for-release-of-its-kidnapped-staff-by-interim-govt](https://hawarnews.com/en/kurdish-red-crescent-calls-for-release-of-its-kidnapped-staff-by-interim-govt;)>;

disappearance of a further member of the organisation's medical staff on the road between Raqqa and Heseke on 18 January 2026.⁹⁰

Obstruction of medical evacuation and ambulance access

The interviews also contain evidence that medical evacuation was obstructed. One witness described trying to coordinate evacuations of the wounded from Khaled Fajer Hospital with the Kurdish Red Crescent and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent on 7 and 10 January 2026 but being obstructed by “the Islamist gangs”. They also describe a tank shell striking the hospital ambulance and being prevented from assisting wounded individuals asking for help.⁹¹

Hospital-management interviewees explained that ambulances could not always be dispatched because of road blockages, checkpoint restrictions, and the closure of routes. Heseke Hospital representatives stated that during the conflict they were unable to send ambulances to some areas because of blockages, and that the road to Sheikh Maqsoud remained closed, preventing support from reaching patients.⁹²

The hospital evidence records that patients were often transferred by civilian vehicles, military vehicles, or whatever transport was available, rather than by ambulance. Qamishlo Military Hospital reported treating more than 400 patients after the January incidents, including persons with bullet wounds, shrapnel injuries, burns, and complex fractures. Heseke Hospital also reported it had received more than 400 patients during the conflict period, including civilians, asayish members, and SDF members, from Sheikh Maqsoud, Raqqa, and Tabqa, with injuries including abdominal wounds, chest wounds, limb injuries, burns, bullet wounds, and shrapnel injuries.⁹³

Other interviews refer to convoys carrying wounded and dead persons being attacked, delayed, or unable to obtain assistance. One witness described reaching a rest area with dead and injured persons and asking for help, only to be told that no assistance could be provided.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ RIC case [14]; Kurdish Lawyers Union, ‘Loss of Contact With Medical Worker Taher Rakan Taher’ (22 February 2026) <<https://kurdishlawyers.org/2026/02/22/loss-of-contact-with-medical-worker-taher-rakan-taher/>>; Kurdish Red Crescent, ‘A Humanitarian Appeal from the Kurdish Red Crescent’ (3 March 2026) <<https://hskurd.org/?p=12041&lang=en>>.

⁹¹ Interview B7.

⁹² Interview B8.

⁹³ Interviews B8 and B9.

⁹⁴ Interview A3.

While the situation in Kobani is outside the scope of this report, the impact of the STG's imposition of a 45-day siege on the city in severely limiting access to vital medical care has been widely reported.⁹⁵

Fear of seeking medical treatment

A repeated theme in the interviews was that wounded persons were afraid to seek medical treatment because doing so could expose them to detention, disappearance, interrogation, or further violence. One interviewee stated that injured persons were sometimes treated at home because they were afraid that if they went to hospital they would be taken away. He referred to a relative receiving medical care in a house because of this fear, and to another wounded person being sent to a hospital in central Aleppo whose whereabouts later became unknown.⁹⁶

Institutional interviewees similarly stated that injured young men feared going to hospitals because they might be accused of being asayish members rather than civilians. One account referred to a group described as the “Liberation of Idlib” taking injured young men and handing them to Turkish intelligence.⁹⁷ Another account described a woman with a role in local autonomous civilian institutions being denied or threatened in relation to medical treatment because of her alleged political affiliation.⁹⁸

Analysis

In the assessment of the FFT, the evidence gives rise to reasonable grounds to believe that medical infrastructure and personnel were subjected to serious violations of IHL during the events of January and February 2026.

The strongest evidence concerns the attacks on hospitals in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah. Multiple independent sources describe hospitals being consistently bombed, including by

⁹⁵ Synergy Hevdestî, ‘Kobani Under Siege: Rapid Humanitarian Deterioration Amid Road Closures and Restricted Access’ (2026) <<https://hevdesti.org/en/kobani-under-siege-rapid-humanitarian-deterioration-amid-road-closures-and-restricted-access/>>; Jineoloji Academy Rojava (n 6) 15–16; Syrian Observatory For Human Rights, ‘Kobani’s Siege Nearly a Month on | Medicine Depleted in Hospitals and Health Authority Warns of Disastrous Repercussions’ (15 February 2026) <<https://www.syriahr.com/en/377803/>>; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 9, 18–19.

⁹⁶ Interview A1.

⁹⁷ Interview A8.

⁹⁸ Interview A8.

drones, during a period in which civilians and wounded persons were sheltering inside or nearby. A range of sources also support the finding that medical staff were killed.

Hospitals and medical personnel are entitled to heightened protection. Medical units lose that protection only if they are used, outside their humanitarian function, to commit acts harmful to the enemy. In the assessment of the FFT, the mere presence of individuals in possession of arms at Khaled Fajer hospital does not meet the threshold of acts harmful to the enemy required to deprive the hospital of heightened protection as a medical unit. This is particularly so in circumstances where it was clear that large numbers of civilians, wounded persons, and medical staff were present, and that the hospital was functioning as a place where the wounded and sick were collected and cared for.

The repeated use of explosive weapons, drones, and tanks against or around hospitals, the damage to hospital structures, the killing of medical staff, and the deprivation of water, electricity, and essential supplies are all consistent with a failure to respect and protect medical units and medical personnel. The available evidence provides reasonable grounds to believe attacks were intentionally directed against hospitals that did not constitute military objectives, amounting to the war crime of intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected.

The evidence also indicates violations of the obligation to collect and care for the wounded and sick. Health workers were prevented from assisting or evacuating the wounded; ambulances were blocked or unable to reach affected areas; injured persons travelled by improvised means; and wounded persons feared seeking treatment because of the risk of detention or further abuse. These facts are inconsistent with the obligation to take all possible measures to search for, collect, and evacuate the wounded and sick without adverse distinction, and to provide medical care required by their condition to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay.

The evidence of adverse distinction in access to care is particularly significant. Several accounts indicate that wounded Kurdish persons, young men, or persons suspected of links to the asayish, SDF, PYD, or the DAANES were afraid to seek treatment, or were denied treatment. The wounded and sick must receive care without distinction on grounds other than medical need. Where access to medical treatment was denied, obstructed, or made unsafe on the basis of ethnicity, or perceived political affiliation, this constitutes a further violation of IHL.

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates a pattern in which medical infrastructure was attacked or rendered inoperable, medical personnel were killed, wounded, and prevented from treating the injured, ambulances and evacuation routes were obstructed, and wounded persons were deterred from seeking treatment. The FFT therefore concludes that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the STG's armed forces and allied militias committed serious violations of IHL in relation to medical infrastructure, medical personnel, and the wounded and sick. In appropriate cases, these acts may amount to war crimes.

Part 8 Arbitrary deprivation of liberty and treatment of detainees



Relevant law

Key points: the law on arbitrary deprivation of liberty

IHL prohibits arbitrarily depriving people of their liberty.

There are detailed rules for what amounts to “**arbitrary**”.

Conditions of detention must be **humane**.

It is a **war crime** to **cruelly treat or torture** detainees or take them as **hostages**.

It is a **crime against humanity** to imprison people in violation of fundamental rules of international law, or to carry out enforced disappearances.

Common Article 3 does not itself prohibit deprivation of liberty. However, where deprivation of liberty becomes the taking of hostages, this is explicitly prohibited by Common Article 3. Common Article 3 also requires humane treatment of all those not taking an active part in hostilities, and this will inform the treatment of those who are detained.

ICRC Rule 99 prohibits “arbitrary deprivation of liberty”. Arbitrariness falls to be determined by what grounds for detention exist, and compliance with procedural requirements.

The ICRC in its commentary on Rule 99 summarises the relevant procedural principles in relation to the deprivation of liberty as follows:

“Human rights law establishes (i) an obligation to inform a person who is arrested of the reasons for arrest, (ii) an obligation to bring a person arrested on a criminal charge promptly before a judge, and (iii) an obligation to provide a person deprived of liberty with an opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of detention (so-called writ of *habeas corpus*). Although obligations (i) and (ii) are not listed as non-derogable in the relevant human rights treaties, human rights case-law has held that they may never be dispensed with altogether.”

“There is, in addition, extensive practice to the effect that persons deprived of their liberty must have access to a lawyer. The Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, adopted by the UN General Assembly without a vote, also specifies that “a detained person shall be entitled to have the assistance of a legal counsel”. In particular, the opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of one’s detention requires the assistance of a lawyer, in order to be effective”

ICRC Rules provide further detail on obligations owed to those who are deprived of their liberty, in order to ensure compliance with Common Article 3. Rule 118 provides that “Persons deprived of their liberty must be provided with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and medical attention”. Separate accommodation must be provided for women (Rule 119) and children (Rule 120).

Pursuant to Rule 122, pillage of the personal belongings of persons deprived of their liberty is prohibited. This is dealt with further in Part 11 of this report.

Detailed ICRC Rules provide for the administrative treatment of those detained and their contact with and return to the outside world. Rule 123 requires that the personal details of persons deprived of their liberty must be recorded; Rule 125 requires that detainees be permitted to correspond with their families; Rule 126 requires that detainees be permitted to receive visits to the degree practicable; and Rule 127 requires that detainees’ religious practices are respected.

As for release from detention, ICRC Rule 128 provides in relation to NIACs that “Persons deprived of their liberty in relation to a non-international armed conflict must be released as soon as the reasons for the deprivation of their liberty cease to exist. The persons referred to may continue to be deprived of their liberty if penal proceedings are pending against them or if they are serving a sentence lawfully imposed”.

Article 8(2)(c)(i)-3 of the Rome Statute of the ICC provides that cruel treatment of those not taking an active part in hostilities is a war crime, defined in the Elements of Crimes as inflicting severe physical or mental pain or suffering upon one or more persons. Where cruel treatment is committed for such purposes as obtaining information or a confession, punishment, intimidation, coercion, or any other reason based on discrimination of any kind, it amounts to the war crime of torture pursuant to Article 8(2)(c)(i)-4.

Article 8(2)(c)(iii) of the Rome Statute also defines the taking of hostages as a war crime. Pursuant to the Elements of Crimes, hostage taking requires that a captor “threatened to kill, injure or continue to detain such person or persons” and that they “intended to compel a State, an international organization, a natural or legal person or a group of persons to act or refrain from acting as an explicit or implicit condition for the safety or the release of such person or persons.”

Article 7(1)(e) of the Rome Statute defines “Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law” as a crime against humanity where the contextual elements set out at Part 5 of this report are present.

Further, Article 7(1)(i) of the Rome Statute defines “Enforced disappearance of persons” as a crime against humanity where, as above, the contextual elements are present. Article 7(2)(i) defines enforced disappearance as “the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time.”

Evidence

The FFT received direct evidence from victims and witnesses of detention and attempted detention during and following the takeover of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo. In addition, the FFT received anecdotal evidence from institutional interviewees concerning the possible scale of enforced disappearances and a pattern of hostage-taking and ransom demands.

Detentions following the takeover of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah

After the takeover of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah, men were separated from women and children, accused of being fighters, and taken into detention. One civilian man described being detained for around ten days after being separated from his family. He was told “You Kurds are all terrorists” and was called a pig. He was held in a severely overcrowded underground cell containing approximately 250 to 300 detainees. He described minimal food and water, no opportunity to wash, inadequate ventilation, confiscation of belongings, electric shocks, beatings, psychological abuse, and pressure to confess.⁹⁹

A child from the same family described women and children being placed on buses while the men were separated. The women and children were told that the men would be released after three or four days. Despite all the women being dressed in civilian clothes, some were accused of being members of the armed forces and detained, including the mother of a child.¹⁰⁰ This evidence is consistent with the broader pattern of separation of men from women and children and the ongoing uncertainty experienced by families concerning the fate of hundreds taken away.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Interview X1.

¹⁰⁰ Interview X2.

¹⁰¹ RIC cases [6] and [8]; Jineoloji Academy Rojava (n 6) 23; Synergy Hevdestî (n 5) 11; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 25–26; Syrians for Truth & Justice, ‘Syria: Arrests and Abuse of Kurds During Aleppo Escalation (January 2026)’ (*Syrians for Truth and Justice*, 9 April 2026) <<https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-arrests-and-abuse-of-kurds-during-aleppo-escalation-january-2026/>>.



Two further people detained prior to the final part of the fighting described a similar pattern. Their accounts included the confiscation of belongings, repeated interrogation, electric shocks, verbal abuse including “you Kurds are pigs”, “YPG pigs”, and “you pigs”, overcrowded cells, inadequate food and water, poor hygiene, and witnessing the torture or ill-treatment of other detainees.¹⁰²

Four members of the *asayish* who were captured after the fighting separately described being forced to strip, being required to wear prison clothing, being blindfolded and handcuffed, being subjected to beatings and electric shocks and being verbally abused including “You are all YPG pigs” and “You Kurds are pigs”. They also described being forced to sign or fingerprint documents without knowing their contents. Their accounts described cells holding hundreds of detainees, with inadequate food, water, hygiene, and medical care.¹⁰³ Two of these witnesses were captured by fighters speaking Turkish, before being handed to Syrian forces or brought to prisons containing Syrian flags.¹⁰⁴

One *asayish* member described being captured after being injured in a drone strike. His account indicates that wounded detainees were held in the same coercive detention environment described by other detainees and did not receive adequate medical care.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Interviews X5 and X10.

¹⁰³ Interviews X6, X7, X8, and X9.

¹⁰⁴ Interviews X6 and X9.

¹⁰⁵ Interview X8.

Anecdotal evidence of enforced disappearances, hostage-taking, and ransom

In addition to the direct evidence summarised above, the FFT received evidence from institutions of the DAANES concerning the possible scale of enforced disappearances and the existence of hostage-taking and ransom practices. A representative of the Sheikh Maqsoud autonomous council reported that Kurds were detained at checkpoints after being identified by their identity documents, and that detainees were accused of being agents, Israeli, Jewish, or unbelievers. He further reported that men and women were taken as hostages, separated, and that families were told they had to pay money in order to recover or see relatives. He referred to a reported demand of \$35,000 for the release of a family from Kobani, with videos allegedly sent to relatives.¹⁰⁶

Institutional interviewees representing displaced persons reported that men were separated from women during evacuations, that men were taken to prison while women were left without transport, and that detained men were tied up. They also referred to approximately 2,000 people missing from Sheikh Maqsoud or Aleppo, with families not knowing whether relatives were hiding, killed, or detained. Given the institutional nature of the interview, this figure should be treated as an anecdotal estimate rather than a verified total.¹⁰⁷ Synergy/Hevdestî reported 541 missing persons from Aleppo at the date of their report.¹⁰⁸ Jineolojî Academy researchers provided the FFT with lists of the names of 378 missing civilians. RIC verified six instances of arbitrary arrest resulting in the detention of over 244 individuals, but estimated the total number of missing people at the date of their report was over 600, including fighters whose death had yet to be announced, detainees held incommunicado, and individuals summarily executed.¹⁰⁹ Civil society representatives interviewed by the FFT referred to hundreds of detainees and people whose whereabouts were unknown.¹¹⁰

Analysis

In the assessment of the FFT, the direct witness evidence gives rise to reasonable grounds to believe that persons were arbitrarily deprived of their liberty during the events of January and February 2026. The strongest evidence concerns the detention of civilians and asayish

¹⁰⁶ Interview A1.

¹⁰⁷ Interview A8.

¹⁰⁸ Synergy Hevdestî (n 5) 11.

¹⁰⁹ Rojava Information Center (n 8) 24.

¹¹⁰ Interview A9; Jineolojî Academy Rojava (n 6) 12; Synergy Hevdestî (n 5) 11.

members in Aleppo after capture or separation from family members. Detainees were held without procedural guarantees, including reasons for arrest, access to a lawyer, contact with families, meaningful judicial review, or the ability to challenge the lawfulness of detention.

The same evidence gives rise to reasonable grounds to believe that detainees were subjected to cruel treatment and torture during detention. Detainees interviewed consistently described electric shocks, beatings, forced nudity, forced wearing of prison clothing, blindfolding, handcuffing, threats, racist insults, forced confessions, forced fingerprinting, lack of medical care, inadequate food and water, and heavily overcrowded and unhygienic detention conditions. These acts constitute severe physical and mental pain and suffering within the definition of the war crime of cruel treatment of persons taking no active part in hostilities including persons hors de combat. The accounts of forced confessions and racist insults also give reasonable grounds to believe that such treatment was perpetrated for purposes including obtaining confessions or for discriminatory reasons, sufficient to meet the definition of the war crime of torture.

The evidence relating to treatment in detention of wounded persons is particularly serious. One detained asayish member was injured before detention, and the evidence indicates wounded detainees did not receive adequate medical care. The detention and mistreatment of wounded detainees is inconsistent with the obligation to treat persons hors de combat humanely and to provide medical attention to persons deprived of their liberty.

The evidence also supports a finding that at least some detentions were accompanied by concealment of detainees' fate or whereabouts from family members. The clearest direct evidence of this arises from the separation of men from women and children, with relatives being told that men would be released later but without meaningful information about where detainees had been taken. Evidence from DAANES institutions and civil society organisations suggests that this may have occurred on a wide scale. These matters require further verification, but they are capable of supporting an investigation into enforced disappearance.

Institutional interviewees reported that detainees were held to compel payment or other action by families, including ransom demands. Such conduct may amount to the taking of hostages, which is prohibited by Common Article 3 and may constitute a war crime.

In the assessment of the FFT, there are reasonable grounds to believe that members of the STG's armed forces and allied militias committed serious violations of IHL in relation to arbitrary deprivation of liberty. In appropriate cases, these acts may amount to war crimes and, insofar as the contextual elements are present, crimes against humanity.

Part 9 Outrages on personal dignity

Relevant law

Key points: the law on outrages on personal dignity

IHL provides detailed and binding prohibitions on outrages on personal dignity, in particular **humiliating and degrading treatment**.

IHL prohibits **mutilation** of the living and the dead.

IHL requires the **return of the dead** to their kin, their respectful disposal, and the maintenance of their graves.

IHL requires the **return of the property** of the dead to their kin.

Outrages on personal dignity, including against the dead, are a war crime.

Common Article 3 prohibits with respect to those not taking an active part in hostilities “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment”. This is a broad obligation which provides the basis for significant customary IHL requirements.

ICRC Rule 113 provides that “Each party to the conflict must take all possible measures to prevent the dead from being despoiled. Mutilation of dead bodies is prohibited.” This requirement is based in Common Article 3, and also reflects the prohibition on pillage (detailed further in Part 11 of this report).

Rule 114 provides that “Parties to the conflict must endeavour to facilitate the return of the remains of the deceased upon request of the party to which they belong or upon the request of their next of kin. They must return their personal effects to them.” The ICRC commentary suggests that this obligation is of a less strong character than that in Rule 113, as it is not directly based in treaty law. However, the requirement to return personal effects to the next of kin of the deceased is likely to be implicit in the prohibition on pillage.

ICRC Rule 115 provides that “The dead must be disposed of in a respectful manner and their graves respected and properly maintained.” Failure to comply with this requirement is likely to also amount to a breach of Common Article 3, on the basis that it would amount to an outrage on personal dignity.

Article 8(2)(c)(ii) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court provides that it is a war crime to commit, against persons taking no active part in hostilities, outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment. The Elements of Crimes makes clear at footnote 57 that the prohibition on outrages upon personal dignity applies equally to dead persons. As such, mutilation of the dead, contrary to ICRC Rule 113, amounts to a war crime in the same manner as mutilation of the living. The same may be said for failure to dispose of the dead in a respectful manner, contrary to ICRC Rule 115.

Evidence

The evidence gathered by the FFT indicates that, during and after the events of January and February 2026, victims and witnesses experienced and observed conduct intended to humiliate, degrade, and despoil both the living and the dead. The evidence includes mutilation of bodies, public display and dissemination of degrading images, the use of racist and sectarian insults, forced nudity and humiliating treatment in detention, obstruction of dignified recovery and burial of the dead, and symbolic attacks on Kurdish women's dignity and public role.

Mutilation and desecration of bodies

The FFT received witness accounts and audiovisual material, including explicit photographs and videos, evidencing that bodies of deceased persons were mutilated and desecrated after death.

Witnesses described a pattern of post-mortem abuse including seeing tattoos having been cut from bodies, hair having been cut from the bodies of female fighters, the ears, nose and sexual organs having been cut from a body, and hearts having been cut from bodies.^{III}

The acts of mutilation described by interviewees are corroborated by the audiovisual evidence reviewed by the FFT. This included explicit images appearing to show a man's heart cut from his body, in relation to which forensic medical analysis concluded that: a wound on the face was likely a gunshot exit wound; there was a wound on the left side of the victim's chest; the chest was likely cut after the victim's death; the ribs were likely cut; and the allegation of removal of his heart could not be ruled out.

^{III} Interviews X12 and A10.

The FFT has also reviewed open-source photographic material which shows a fighter aligned with the STG, Rami Al-Dahash, holding a woman's cut off braid; and audiovisual evidence of the body of a woman fighter, Deniz Çiya, being thrown from a building. Both incidents are analysed in Part 13 of this report, in relation to gender-based rights violations.

Further visual evidence received by the FFT appears to show a body being pulled by the legs with rope, the chests and faces of multiple dead YPJ fighters being stepped on, dead YPJ fighters being pulled by their hair, bodies being run over by military vehicles, and bodies without heads and limbs. Redacted versions of visual evidence of mutilation and desecration of dead bodies that have been cross-checked and verified through geolocation and NGO identification have been published by RIC,¹¹² and unredacted copies are available.

These acts of desecration and mutilation were described by witnesses as deliberate forms of humiliation and as resembling methods previously associated with ISIS.¹¹³ The evidence analysed by the FFT indicates that these acts were not incidental to killings but were carried out after death in a manner intended to degrade the victims.

Public display, filming, and dissemination of humiliating material

Multiple interviewees referred to perpetrators filming killings, mutilation, and degrading treatment, and circulating those videos publicly or among affected families. One witness described a relative being captured and killed in Naim Square in Raqqa, with video of the killing circulated among family members. The circulation of such material deepened the humiliation and suffering of relatives and served to intimidate the wider community.¹¹⁴

Detainees described being photographed or recorded, and having their names, photographs, or personal data entered into prisoner records or shared online. In the context of detention accompanied by insults, beatings, forced nudity, and coercion, this recording and circulation of personal data formed part of the wider pattern of humiliation.¹¹⁵ The public dissemination of degrading and abusive treatment of detainees is also corroborated by evidence in RIC and Synergy/Hevdestî reports.¹¹⁶

112 RIC cases [5], [7], and [21]; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 32.

113 Interviews XI 1, XI 2, and XI 3.

114 Interviews A1 and A6.

115 Interviews X5, X6, X7, X8, X9, and X10.

116 Synergy Hevdestî (n 5) 12; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 24–29.

Disrespectful treatment of the dead and families seeking the dead, and obstruction of burial

Many witnesses described bodies being left in streets, hospitals, houses, or public spaces without prompt and respectful collection. One witness described seeing bodies in the streets and large numbers of dead at the hospital, with insufficient space in the refrigerators and bodies being placed in surrounding houses. Other witnesses described bodies left uncollected on roads, run over, or gathered in large numbers for identification without proper procedure.¹¹⁷

The family of one deceased civilian described having to identify a body among approximately 150 bodies laid out without any clear procedure. The family was not provided with documentation concerning the time, cause, or circumstances of death, and was unable to obtain information about the deceased's vehicle, documents, or other personal belongings.¹¹⁸ The FFT's analysis of audiovisual evidence cataloguing dead bodies found there was a mixed use of scripts and coding, indicating a dual-system documentation process, possibly involving multiple agencies.

Other witnesses gave accounts of families being humiliated, obstructed, or coerced when seeking to recover bodies. One interviewee described relatives being killed at a checkpoint and bodies being withheld until family members signed a false statement attributing responsibility for the killing to the SDF.¹¹⁹ Institutional witnesses also described families being asked for money to recover bodies and being insulted when seeking the remains of relatives.¹²⁰

Humiliating and degrading treatment of detainees and civilians

As set out in Part 8 of this report, witnesses described being subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment during detention and interrogation, including electric shocks, beatings, forced nudity, forced wearing of prison clothing, blindfolding, handcuffing, threats, racist insults, forced confessions, and forced signing or fingerprinting of unknown documents.¹²¹ Detainees also described being held in severely overcrowded cells, being unable to lie down,

¹¹⁷ Interviews A1, A9, B1, X3, and X5.

¹¹⁸ Interview X3.

¹¹⁹ Interview A6.

¹²⁰ Interview A8.

¹²¹ Interviews X5, X6, X7, X8, X9, and X10.

being exposed to infectious diseases, with inadequate food, water, shower access, ventilation, hygiene, and medical care.¹²²

The insults used by perpetrators were frequently racial, ethnic, or sectarian in nature. Civilians and detainees described being called “pigs”, “dirty animals”, “dogs”, “terrorists”, “infidels”, “Israeli”, “Jewish”, and “non-believers”. Such language was used in the context of detention, abuse at checkpoints, expulsions, searches, and threats.¹²³

A civilian sheltering by the hospital in Sheikh Maqsoud described civilians being searched while leaving for buses organised to remove them from their neighbourhoods, insulted, and hit with weapons. Fighters reportedly told civilians that they were “dogs” and that they would be stepped on. This occurred in the context of civilians leaving an area in which they had sheltered from attack and where many dead and wounded persons were present.¹²⁴

Gendered and cultural humiliation

As detailed in Part 13, a repeated theme in the evidence gathered by the FFT was the humiliation of Kurdish women and women associated with the public, political, or defence structures of the DAANES. Witnesses described threats against women working in public administration, publication of personal information, and attacks on women’s centres, libraries, and statues. The public dissemination of images of abused YPJ female fighters, the cutting of tattoos and hair, and the targeting of women’s bodies indicates that outrages on personal dignity had a clear gendered dimension. These acts targeted not only individual victims but the dignity of the Kurdish community more broadly and the status of women within it.¹²⁵

Analysis

In the assessment of the FFT, the evidence gives rise to reasonable grounds to believe that the STG’s armed forces and allied militias committed outrages on personal dignity during the events of January and February 2026.

The strongest evidence concerns the mutilation and desecration of bodies. The deliberate cutting of tattoos from bodies, cutting of hair, public filming of bodies, and circulation of

122 Interviews X1, X5, X6, X7, X8, X9, and X10.

123 Interviews A1, A2, X1, X5, X6, X7, X8, X9, and X10.

124 Interview A2.

125 Interviews A10, X12, and X13.

humiliating material are all acts which violate the dignity of the dead. The prohibition on outrages upon personal dignity applies equally to dead persons. Mutilation of the dead, failure to prevent despoiling of bodies, and failure to dispose of the dead respectfully may therefore amount to serious violations of IHL and to war crimes.

The evidence concerning the handling of bodies also demonstrates serious violations. Bodies were left in streets, hospitals, and public places; families were required to identify relatives among large numbers of bodies without proper procedure; bodies were withheld or returned only after coercion; and documents and personal effects were not returned. These acts are inconsistent with the obligations to prevent despoiling of the dead, facilitate the return of remains and personal effects, and dispose of the dead in a respectful manner.

The treatment of detainees also amounted to humiliating and degrading treatment. Electric shocks, beatings, forced nudity, forced wearing of prison clothing, blindfolding, handcuffing, threats, racist insults, forced confessions, forced fingerprinting, lack of medical care, inadequate food and water, and heavily overcrowded and unhygienic detention conditions were not merely incidental features of detention. They formed part of a pattern of degrading treatment directed at persons under the control of the STG.

The repeated use of racist, ethnic, and sectarian insults reinforces the conclusion that much of the treatment described was intended to degrade and humiliate. Victims were described in terms which were or were intended to be derogatory. These words were used in contexts of detention, search, expulsion, violence, and body recovery, and therefore formed part of the conduct constituting outrages on personal dignity.

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates a pattern of conduct involving humiliation, degradation, mutilation, despoiling of bodies, obstruction of dignified burial, and attacks on the dignity of detainees, families, women and the dead. In the assessment of the FFT, these acts may amount to the war crime of outrages upon personal dignity, including humiliating and degrading treatment.

Part 10 Attacks on members of armed forces not taking an active part in hostilities



Relevant law

Key points: the law on attacks on members of the armed forces not taking an active part in hostilities

In NIACs, members of armed forces will not be treated as “prisoners of war”, but they are still entitled to protection.

Anyone not taking an active part in hostilities is entitled to **humane treatment**.

There are detailed IHL prohibitions on inhumane treatment of members of the armed forces not taking an active part in hostilities.

Murder, cruel treatment, and torture of members of the armed forces not taking an active part in hostilities are war crimes.

In NIACs, members of the armed forces who are detained by opposing powers are not automatically regarded as “prisoners of war” in the formal legal sense provided for by IHL. It is open to a government to accord to both civilians and members of opposing armed forces who fall into its power in the context of a NIAC a greater degree of protection than that ordinarily afforded by IHL, by according them the protections of the Geneva Conventions in

respect of civilians and prisoners of war respectively. However, the STG has not indicated any such intention.

However, this does not leave detainees in a NIAC without both general and specific legal guarantees under IHL. Common Article 3 provides explicit protection to members of the armed forces not taking an active part in hostilities. Specifically protected in this regard are those who have laid down their arms and those placed “hors de combat” by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause. Such individuals must be treated humanely without discrimination in all circumstances. Without prejudice to the broad nature of this protection, the following acts are specifically prohibited by Common Article 3:

- “(a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (b) taking of hostages;
- (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.”

In addition, customary IHL provides continuing protections for detained members of the armed forces. ICRC Rule 87 provides that “Civilians and persons hors de combat must be treated humanely.” Specific prohibitions are set out in subsequent rules, but do not limit the scope of protection provided for by either the customary rule or Common Article 3.

In this regard, “murder” is prohibited by Rule 89; “Torture, cruel or inhuman treatment and outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment” are prohibited by Rule 90; corporal punishment is prohibited by Rule 91; mutilation (among other things) is prohibited by Rule 92; rape and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited by Rule 93; slavery is prohibited by Rule 94; hostage taking is prohibited by Rule 96; enforced disappearance is prohibited by Rule 98; and collective punishment is prohibited by Rule 103. As noted in Part 8 of this report, Rule 99 prohibits arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

Murder of those not taking an active part in hostilities amounts to a war crime pursuant to Article 8(2)(c)(i)-I of the Rome Statute. Cruel treatment of those not taking an active part in hostilities amounts to a war crime pursuant to Article 8(2)(c)(i)-3 of the Rome Statute.

Torture of those not taking an active part in hostilities amounts to a war crime pursuant to Article 8(2)(c)(i)-4 of the Rome Statute.

Evidence

Cruel treatment and torture in detention

Several members of the asayish described being captured after the fighting in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah. They were no longer taking part in hostilities. They described being blindfolded, handcuffed, beaten, subjected to electric shocks, forced to strip naked, forced to wear prison clothing, and transferred between detention facilities. They were interrogated about their alleged links to the SDF, asayish, and intelligence structures, and were forced to sign or fingerprint documents without knowing their contents.¹²⁶

The same accounts described coercive and violent interrogation. Detainees were beaten with hands, feet, and objects; subjected to electric shocks; threatened; and insulted. The conduct was directed at extracting confessions or information from persons who had already fallen into the power of opposing forces.¹²⁷

A traffic and security officer detained in Aleppo before the final days of fighting gave evidence of capture, detention, transfer between facilities, physical abuse, and harsh prison conditions. His account corroborates the pattern of treatment described by captured asayish members.¹²⁸

Captured persons were also held in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, with inadequate food, water, hygiene, and medical care. Some cells were described as holding hundreds of people, and detainees described being unable to lie down. Inadequate medical care was provided to wounded detainees.¹²⁹

Killings and executions after capture or at checkpoints

The FFT received evidence of killings of persons who had been stopped, captured, or otherwise brought under the control of STG-aligned armed groups at checkpoints. Witnesses

¹²⁶ Interviews X6, X7, X8, and X9.

¹²⁷ Interviews X6, X7, and X9.

¹²⁸ Interview X10.

¹²⁹ Interviews X5, X6, X7, X8, X9, and X10.

and survivors described the detention at checkpoints of people perceived as being associated with the SDF or asayish, and the beating and summary execution of some of those detained.¹³⁰

The FFT has viewed photographic evidence of bodies lined up beside roads, many of them with their hands visibly bound, demonstrating that the victims were unable to resist at the time of their killings. These accounts overlap with the evidence concerning the treatment of the dead addressed in Part 9 of this report, but are also relevant to the treatment of persons who had ceased to take an active part in hostilities.

Witnesses described asayish members surrendering or laying down weapons in order to protect their families, and reported that some were killed after surrender or that bodies were found without weapons.¹³¹



Mutilation and abuse after killing

The FFT received evidence that bodies of SDF and in particular YPJ members were mutilated after death, including by the cutting of tattoos, cutting out of body parts, and cutting of hair. This evidence is analysed in Part 9 of this report. It is also relevant to this Part because many

¹³⁰ Interviews A5, B1, and B3.

¹³¹ Interviews A1, A2, and B7.

of those whose bodies were mutilated were alleged to have been SDF or asayish members who had already been killed or otherwise placed beyond active participation in hostilities.

Analysis

In the FFT's assessment, there are reasonable grounds to believe that members of the asayish and SDF were subjected to violence, torture, and cruel treatment after they had been captured, detained, wounded, or otherwise ceased to take an active part in hostilities.

The strongest evidence concerns captured asayish members from Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah. Their accounts demonstrate that persons who had fallen into the power of the STG, its allied militias, and Turkish military advisors were subjected to electric shocks, beatings, forced nudity, blindfolding, handcuffing, forced confessions, inadequate medical care, and overcrowded detention conditions. Such persons were entitled to humane treatment under Common Article 3 and customary IHL, notwithstanding the absence of formal prisoner of war status.

The treatment of wounded detainees is also particularly serious. In the assessment of the FFT, this evidence is inconsistent with the obligations owed to persons placed hors de combat by reason of wounds or detention.

The evidence of killings during detention is also significant. Persons who were brought under the control of armed groups were no longer legitimate targets of attack. Their killing amounts to murder of persons taking no active part in hostilities.

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates a pattern of attacks on members of armed forces not taking an active part in hostilities. In the assessment of the FFT there are reasonable grounds to believe that members of the STG's armed forces and allied militias committed serious violations of IHL in this regard. In appropriate cases, these acts may amount to the war crimes of murder, cruel treatment, and torture.

Part 11 Pillage

Relevant law

Key points: the law on pillage

IHL prohibits pillage generally, and specifically protects the wounded and sick, those deprived of their liberty, and displaced people.

IHL protects educational and cultural institutions or property from seizure, destruction and wilful damage.

Pillage is a war crime.

Although pillage is prohibited by APII, it is not explicitly or necessarily implicitly prohibited by Common Article 3.

ICRC Rule 52 prohibits pillage. Rule 111 provides specific protection against pillage to the wounded and sick, stating that “Each party to the conflict must take all possible measures to protect the wounded, sick and shipwrecked against ill-treatment and against pillage of their personal property”. Rule 122 prohibits pillage of the belongings of persons deprived of their liberty. Rule 133 requires that property rights of displaced persons be respected.

ICRC Rule 40 prohibits seizure, destruction or wilful damage to institutions dedicated to religion, charity, education, the arts and sciences, historic monuments, and works of art and science.

Article 8(2)(e)(v) of the Rome Statute of the ICC makes “Pillaging a town or place, even when taken by assault” a war crime. According to the Elements of Crimes, this requires the non-consensual appropriation of property for private or personal use with the intention to deprive the owner of the property. Appropriations justified by military necessity cannot constitute the crime of pillaging.

Evidence

Seizure of private property

Accounts of seizure by force of individuals' private property featured frequently in the detailed individual testimonies taken by the FFT. These incidents took place in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo,¹³² Raqqa,¹³³ the road between Raqqa and Heseke,¹³⁴ and Heseke.¹³⁵

Types of property pillaged from individuals ranged from gold, documents, money, clothes, electronics, and other personal belongings,¹³⁶ to larger items such as vehicles.¹³⁷ In many accounts, houses belonging to the forcibly displaced or detained in Sheikh Maqsoud, Raqqa, and Heseke along with personal belongings inside those houses were seized.¹³⁸ These accounts are consistent with evidence of looting and occupation collated by RIC including thousands of incidents reported to the NES Local NGOs Coordination Group.¹³⁹

A number of witnesses gave evidence that the houses of women who had held positions in structures of the DAANES were seized and looted. Witnesses gave examples of this from Sheikh Maqsoud¹⁴⁰ and Raqqa.¹⁴¹

Case study: Seizure and occupation of civilian home

The FFT took detailed testimony from a woman (A6) who was forced to flee her home in Raqqa on Sunday 18 January 2026. This woman is a civilian who had held a co-chair position in one of the departments of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of Raqqa. She reported having been threatened by tribes connected to Hamza Division and Amshat before she fled with her children.

When the interviewee was on the road between Raqqa and Heseke, she received messages from STG-aligned militants who had occupied her house. They sent her images showing how they had vandalised her home and labelled it 'The Military Ministry'. The interviewee identifies one of the individuals as Abu Huseifa, who had previously occupied her house for 4 years while ISIS had control of Raqqa. The interviewee stated: "*It is the same person who took my house during the ISIS period.*"

¹³² Interviews A1, X1, X2, X5, and X10.

¹³³ Interviews A4 and A6.

¹³⁴ Interviews B1 and X3.

¹³⁵ Interview X4.

¹³⁶ Interviews A3, B1, X1, X3, X5, X6, and X10.

¹³⁷ Interviews B1, X3, and X10.

¹³⁸ Interviews A1, A4, A6, X1, X2, and X4.

¹³⁹ Rojava Information Center (n 8) 43–44.

¹⁴⁰ Interview A1.

¹⁴¹ Interviews A4 and A6.

He said ‘I will take back my properties, I will take my revenge on the SDF’”. She believes that he was previously affiliated to ISIS and is now affiliated with Turkish-linked forces. The FFT has seen visual evidence corroborating this account.

When a family member later went to this interviewee’s house and asked the occupiers why they had taken her property, they said: *“This is government property, it is from the pigs”*.

The interviewee stated: *“We as Kurdish people are always targeted by all authorities. When ISIS came to Raqqa they took over my house, so we went to Gire Spi. In Gire Spi the Turkish state came there and took over my house. In 2010 the Syrian government took my house and captured the family. The Kurds of Raqqa and Kurds in general are always targeted by all powers.”*

This interviewee reported that one of her family members whose house was also occupied had since returned to Raqqa. The occupiers had forced him to pay 3,000 dollars to regain access to his home. The occupier was reportedly a member of the Hamza Division and had threatened the interviewee’s relative that if he did not pay the ransom the occupier would inform the authorities that he was an ally of the SDF.

Pillage of persons deprived of their liberty

Most individuals interviewed by the FFT who had been detained had their personal belongings taken from them while they were deprived of their liberty.

Almost all accounts taken from individuals detained in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo and subsequently imprisoned had their personal belongings seized from them at the start of their detention without being provided with any form of documentation for their belongings, which were not returned on their release.^{I42} This happened both to members of the asayish engaged in combat at the time of detention and to unarmed civilians.

Reports that belongings were seized from individuals held at checkpoints also featured in multiple testimonies.^{I43}

Case study: Pillage of the dead

The husband of one interviewee (X3) was killed during the attacks. Both the interviewee and her husband were Kurdish and originally from Kobani. The interviewee’s husband was a civilian. She last spoke to him over the phone on the morning of 18 January 2026 between 7:30 and 8:00 am, before losing

^{I42} Interviews XI, X5, X6, and X10.

^{I43} Interviews BI and X10.

communication at around 11:30 am. On 21 January 2026 she learnt through videos and social media posts that her husband had been killed.

Family members attempted to retrieve the interviewee's husband's body in Raqqa. 150 bodies were laid on the ground without authorities having established a procedure. They were provided no documentation concerning the time, cause or circumstances of his death. The interviewee and her family have been unable to obtain information regarding the location of her husband's vehicle or its contents, including documentation and other personal belongings.

Seizure, destruction of, and wilful damage to institutions dedicated to education, history and culture, and cultural monuments

Interviewees emphasised that during the attacks in Aleppo, Tabqa, and Raqqa, buildings, spaces, and monuments associated with the women's movement were seized, pillaged, and destroyed. Interviewees described how Zenobia and Jineolojî centres in Raqqa¹⁴⁴ and Tabqa¹⁴⁵ were seized and ransacked. Interviewees had witnessed this pillage or its aftermath and recorded audiovisual evidence of it. The FFT has examined this material, which corroborates their accounts. As detailed further below in relation to gender-based rights violations in Part 13, a video that circulated widely during the attacks, which was referred to by interviewees and which the FFT has seen, shows members of armed factions pulling down a statue in Tabqa of a woman fighter.¹⁴⁶

Case study: the destruction of the Nagihan Akarsel Reading House

In Sheikh Maqsoud, Aleppo, interviewees described the seizure and pillage of the Nagihan Akarsel Reading House, a library and cultural space opened by the Jineolojî Academy in October 2023 to honour a woman who dedicated her life to women's history, culture, knowledge, and freedom, and was assassinated in Sulaymaniah, Iraqi Kurdistan. One witness described this as follows:

¹⁴⁴ Interview A4.

¹⁴⁵ Interview A10.

¹⁴⁶ Interview A4; Karam Almasri, 'Licensable Picture: A Group of Civilians Smash a Statue of a Syrian Democratic Forces Fighter in the City of Tabqa after the Syrian Army Took Control of It' (*Reuters Connect*, 18 January 2026) <

“Nagihan Akarsel was a Kurdish woman who was killed in Suleimani with 11 shots. For her, we established a library in Aleppo, in Sheikh Maqsoud.

If you go to Aleppo you can take any weapon you want but books are not allowed. Some of us would put books in bags, or under our clothes so they wouldn’t see them. If they found them they would take them or do things with it. This library was established by women and girls. Girls who couldn’t read or write learned there and they helped a lot of girls. Because of the government a lot of students weren’t able to go to school and study, so they went to the academy and learned to read and write.

HTS attacked the library and took the books related to women, Kurdish, ecology, and burnt everything. Then they got their Islamic religious books and brought them into the library.”

These incidents are analysed further in Part 13 of this report in relation to gender-based rights violations.

Analysis

The material reviewed by the FFT provides reasonable grounds to believe that the war crime of pillage was committed by members of the armed forces of the STG and allied militias.

Individual acts of pillage against civilians occurred throughout the conflict, involving the appropriation of a broad range of property, from personal effects to entire homes. These acts of pillage have been so widespread as to amount to a tolerated practice on the part of individual soldiers. Victims of forced displacement were at particular risk, as they were unable to protect their own property.

There are also reasonable grounds to believe that STG-aligned forces pillaged institutions perceived as associated with the DAANES, including councils, women’s centres, and libraries, and destroyed cultural monuments including a tribute to the YPJ. These acts are violations of the prohibition of seizure, destruction, or wilful damage to institutions dedicated to charity, education, the arts and sciences, historic monuments, or works of art and science under customary IHL.

Further, the existence of consistent and credible evidence gives rise to reasonable grounds to believe that there was a campaign of pillage carried out against detainees. Most long-term detainees had personal effects stolen from them. Even those whose detention was short, and conducted in the course of their forced displacement from the neighbourhood of Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo, experienced or witnessed acts of pillage of personal effects. A clear

pattern of conduct emerged, involving members of the STG's military consistently requiring the surrender of mobile phones of those who were detained, with them not being subsequently returned. The seriousness of these acts of pillage is compounded by the property being pillaged being mobile phones which many interviewees identified as containing evidence of other war crimes. As such, the acts of pillage appear to have been conducted at least in part in order to prevent the gathering of evidence and to ensure impunity for crimes.

Part 12 Displacement

Relevant law

Key points: the law on displacement

Forced displacement is prohibited.

Forced displacement can amount to both a war crime, and a crime against humanity.

IHL requires that people who are displaced are sheltered and families are kept together.

IHL requires that the property of displaced people is respected.

IHL requires that displaced people are allowed to return home.

Forced displacement is not explicitly or necessarily implicitly prohibited by Common Article 3. However, customary IHL provides detailed restrictions on forced displacement.

ICRC Rule 129 provides that “Parties to a non-international armed conflict may not order the displacement of the civilian population, in whole or in part, for reasons related to the conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand.”

ICRC Rule 131 provides that “In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken in order that the civilians concerned are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition and that members of the same family are not separated.”

ICRC Rule 132 in turn provides that “Displaced persons have a right to voluntary return in safety to their homes or places of habitual residence as soon as the reasons for their displacement cease to exist.” Rule 133 provides that “The property rights of displaced persons must be respected.” This broadly reflects the prohibition on pillage, set out in Part 11 of this report.

Principle 6 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,¹⁴⁷ prohibits all arbitrary displacement from a person’s home or habitual residence. This explicitly includes displacement based on

¹⁴⁷ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement’ (United Nations 2001) OCHA/IDP/2004/01.

“ethnic cleansing” or similar practices aimed at or resulting in altering the ethnic, religious, or racial composition of the affected population. It also includes displacement in situations of armed conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Principle 6(3) requires that “Displacement shall last no longer than required by the circumstances”. Where displacement does occur, Principle 8 requires that “Displacement shall not be carried out in a manner that violates the right to life, dignity, liberty and security of those affected.” Further Principles elucidate detailed rights for displaced persons, many of which reflect the obligations existing in IHL. As such, they may provide a degree of interpretive assistance to customary IHL obligations.

Article 8(2)(e)(viii) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines as a war crime “Ordering the displacement of the civilian population for reasons related to the conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand”. This is directly reflected in the prohibition in ICRC Rule 129.

Article 7(1)(d) of the Rome Statute defines as a crime against humanity “Deportation or forcible transfer of population”. This is further defined by Article 7(2)(d) as “forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law”. As always, the contextual elements explained in Part 5 of this report must be present for this to amount to a crime against humanity.

In this regard, the term “forcibly” is defined in footnote 12 of the Elements of Crimes as follows: ““forcibly” is not restricted to physical force, but may include threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power against such person or persons or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment.” Further “deported or forcibly transferred” is defined in footnote 13 as interchangeable with “forcibly displaced”.

Evidence

The evidence gathered by the FFT indicates that the events of January and February 2026 caused large-scale displacement from Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafiyah, Raqqa, Tabqa, the Heseke countryside, and surrounding areas. Many of those displaced were Kurdish civilians who had already experienced earlier displacement, particularly from Afrin. The accounts therefore

demonstrate not only a single episode of flight, but repeated and cumulative displacement, accompanied by loss of homes, property, livelihoods, education, community institutions, and security. Reception conditions were difficult, but were ameliorated to a great extent by the resilience of DAANES institutions which continued to function.

Scale and pattern of displacement

Interviewees described a broad pattern of displacement across NES. Displaced persons came from Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafiyah, Raqqa, Tabqa, Heseke, Kobani, Afrin and other areas. Institutional interviewees and displaced persons' representatives referred to approximately 8,000 families displaced to Qamishlo, and approximately 120,000 displaced persons across DAANES, being housed in public shelters.¹⁴⁸ The RIC and Synergy/Hevdestî reports corroborate the scale and pattern of displacement.¹⁴⁹ By the end of January the UNHCR was reporting over 190,000 individuals from Aleppo, Raqqa, and Heseke governorates had been displaced since the start of the year.¹⁵⁰



This institutional evidence is consistent with accounts from individual interviewees who described being forced from their homes after attacks, threats, armed groups taking control

¹⁴⁸ Interviews A8 and A9.

¹⁴⁹ Synergy Hevdestî (n 5) 13; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 43.

¹⁵⁰ UNHCR, 'Situation in Northeast Syria - Flash Update' (2026) <<https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136332/unhcr-northeast-syria-situation-flash-update.pdf>>.

of neighbourhoods, or the collapse of security. Several interviewees described leaving with limited belongings and reaching Qamishlo, Heseke, Derik, or other areas where emergency accommodation was provided.¹⁵¹

Forced displacement from Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafiyah, Raqqa, Tabqa, and Heseke

The evidence gathered by the FFT indicates that displacement was caused by a coercive environment of violence, siege, threats, killings, detention, and fear of further abuse. As set out in Part 6 of this report, in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah, before civilians were forced out of the neighbourhoods, witnesses described siege conditions; deprivation of food, water, fuel, and electricity; attacks on civilian areas and hospitals; and racist abuse.¹⁵² Further, interviewees displaced from Raqqa and Tabqa fled after the approach or arrival of STG-aligned forces in a context of attacks on civilians, summary executions, detention, abuse and mistreatment on the basis of Kurdish ethnicity or perceived political affiliation. Kurdish civilians and persons associated with the DAANES described fearing detention, killing, looting, and other forms of violence if they remained.¹⁵³ The circumstances described by these interviewees indicate that their displacement was not voluntary in any meaningful sense.

Heseke was also affected by displacement. One family originally from Afrin had been displaced in 2018, later lived in Heseke, before fleeing again in January 2026 after armed clashes and threats in the area. Their home in Heseke was looted and property was destroyed after they fled.¹⁵⁴

Repeated displacement and inability to return

A significant number of interviewees had already been displaced before January 2026. Many originated from Afrin and had been displaced in 2018 by the Turkish invasion and occupation of their home region. They had rebuilt their lives in Shehba, Raqqa, Tabqa, Heseke, Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafiyah, and other areas under the control of the DAANES. For those interviewees, the January and February 2026 events formed part of a longer pattern of repeated displacement.¹⁵⁵

151 Interviews A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, X1, X2, X3, and X4.

152 Interviews A1, A2, B3, B7, X1, X2, X5, X6, X7, X8, X9, X10, and X13.

153 Interviews A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B4, and B5.

154 Interview X4.

155 Interviews A3, B1, B2, X4, and X12.

Interviewees stated that they wished to return home but could not do so safely. Families originating from Afrin described being unable to return to Afrin because their homes were occupied, destroyed, looted, or unsafe, and because they feared further violence or detention. Other interviewees described being unable to return to areas now under the control of the STG or its allied militias because of continuing insecurity, armed-group control, threats, property loss, and lack of safety guarantees.¹⁵⁶

Shelter and humanitarian conditions

Displaced persons were accommodated in schools, mosques, stadiums, academies, and other collective shelters. Several accounts described 7 or 8 families living in a single classroom. One family described living in a Qamishlo school with 44 families and approximately 218 people in the same building, with inadequate kitchen and bathroom facilities.¹⁵⁷ Interviewees referred to a lack of privacy, water, electricity, bathrooms, sanitation, food, hygiene items, healthcare, clothing, and heating. Many families were unable to work or pay rent and were dependent on support from DAANES structures and limited humanitarian assistance.¹⁵⁸

The use of schools as shelters disrupted education. Interviewees described schools being unavailable for their normal educational function because they were being used to house displaced families.¹⁵⁹

The conditions of displacement created particular risks for children. Interviewees described children experiencing repeated displacement, loss of education, psychological distress, family separations and unsafe living conditions.¹⁶⁰ One account referred to the death of a child in a school shelter as a result of a stove explosion.¹⁶¹

The FFT visited a school in Qamishlo where families were taking shelter in unsanitary conditions, with insufficient protection from the elements. One mother resident there described how adult members of the family had to stay awake through the night to stop rats

156 Interviews A2, A3, and X4.

157 Interviews A8 and X4.

158 Interviews A8, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, X4, and X10.

159 Interviews A8, X4, and X13.

160 Interviews X4 and X13.

161 Interview X13.

from biting the children. The FFT also witnessed the distribution of basic necessities by the DAANES to displaced families.

Family separation and vulnerability in displacement

Interviewees described families being separated during displacement. Men were frequently separated from women and children after neighbourhoods were taken over or at the points where displaced persons were moved onward. In some accounts, men were detained or disappeared, while women and children continued into displacement without them.¹⁶²

Property loss, looting, and occupation of homes

As detailed in Part I I, a repeated theme in the interviews was that displacement was followed by the looting, destruction, occupation, or repurposing of civilian homes. Interviewees described locks being changed, belongings stolen, homes vandalised, gardens destroyed, and fighters or affiliated civilians occupying houses after residents fled.¹⁶³ A Kurdish woman who fled Raqqa identified one of the men who had occupied her home as the person who had previously occupied her home during ISIS control in Raqqa, demonstrating continuity in personnel between the military forces of ISIS and the STG.¹⁶⁴

Demographic and collective consequences

Several interviewees linked displacement to broader allegations of demographic change. They described Kurdish homes being occupied by fighters or transferred to others, Kurdish residents being prevented from returning, and earlier patterns of displacement from Afrin being repeated in other parts of Syria. Some witnesses described this as part of a longer history of demographic engineering affecting Kurdish areas.¹⁶⁵

Analysis

In the assessment of the FFT, the evidence gives rise to reasonable grounds to believe that civilians were forcibly displaced during the events of January and February 2026. The evidence demonstrates that civilians left Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafiyah, Raqqa, Tabqa, Heseke, and other

¹⁶² Interviews A2, A8, X1, and X2.

¹⁶³ Interviews A4, A6, X1, X2, and X4.

¹⁶⁴ Interview A6.

¹⁶⁵ Interviews A6, X4, and X11.

areas in circumstances of attacks and siege tactics targeting civilians, alongside the threat of detention and killings. These were coercive circumstances, and their displacement cannot be characterised as voluntary.

The displacement which occurred is particularly serious because many of those displaced had already been displaced from Afrin or other areas. The January and February 2026 events therefore produced repeated displacement of families who had already lost homes and livelihoods. Repeated displacement increased vulnerability and made return more difficult, because many families had no secure home to which they could safely return.

The evidence concerning shelter conditions indicates that despite the best efforts of the DAANES and the community in NES, displaced persons were not received in adequate conditions. Public buildings were used as emergency shelters, often in severely overcrowded conditions. Families lacked privacy, water, and sanitation. Children were particularly affected by the conversion of schools into shelters and by the instability of repeated displacement.

The right of displaced persons to safe return was not respected in practice. Interviewees described an inability to return because of continuing threats and fear of detention or violence based on their prior experiences and lack of accountability for those violations.

The evidence also demonstrates serious violations of the property rights of displaced persons. Homes were looted, occupied, destroyed, or repurposed. This is inconsistent with the respect for the property rights of displaced persons and further acts as an obstacle to return.

Taken together, in the assessment of the FFT, there are reasonable grounds to believe that members of the STG's armed forces and allied militias committed serious violations of IHL in relation to displacement. In appropriate cases, these acts may amount to the war crime of ordering the displacement of the civilian population and, insofar as the contextual elements explained in Part 5 are present, to the crimes against humanity of deportation or forcible transfer of population.

Part 13 Gender-based rights violations

Relevant law

Key points: the law on gender-based rights violations and discrimination

Discrimination on the grounds of sex in the application of IHL is prohibited.

Gender-based violence may itself amount to a breach of international law.

Persecution on the basis of political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, or gender grounds in the context of other crimes may be a crime against humanity.

Common Article 3 requires that the humane treatment of those persons taking no active part in hostilities is achieved “without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria”.

ICRC Rule 88 provides wider non-discrimination requirements in respect of the application of the entirety of IHL: “Adverse distinction in the application of international humanitarian law based on race, colour, sex, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status, or on any other similar criteria is prohibited.”

In the application of international human rights law, the Charter of the United Nations and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights contain prohibitions on various forms of discrimination which include discrimination on the grounds of sex.

When the contextual elements as set out in Part 5 of this report are present, persecution of women on the ground of their gender, combined in appropriate cases with race or ethnicity or political opinion, in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the ICC, may amount to a crime against humanity pursuant to Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Evidence

Targeting of women’s bodies and dignity

As set out in Part 9 of this report, survivors the FFT interviewed described seeing many mutilated and desecrated bodies of women fighters. Witnesses had seen numerous bodies of

women fighters with tattoos or hair cut from them and the body of a woman affiliated with a civilian organisation that had been played with.¹⁶⁶

Interviewees from DAANES women's structures emphasised that the cultural significance of women's tattoos, long hair, and braids meant acts of desecration targeting them were understood to be directed not only at the individual victims, but at the dignity of Kurdish women and the women's movement more broadly.¹⁶⁷ Witnesses referred to a particular incident that became a flashpoint for this:¹⁶⁸ a video published on 20 January 2026 and circulated widely online of STG-aligned fighter Rami Al-Dahash, holding up a severed braid and boasting about it, stating it belonged to an SDF Kurdish female fighter from Raqqa. When the person filming asked Al-Dahash why he had cut the woman's hair, he responded that she would "go [die] anyway". This incident was followed by a campaign in which women shared images and videos of themselves braiding their hair, accompanied by the Kurdish slogan *Jin, Jiyan, Azadî* ("Woman, Life, Freedom"), reflecting the symbolic significance attributed to the woman's hair and to the Kurdish women's resistance, as described by interviewees.

In-depth analysis of this incident by the Information Centre Anti-Kurdish Racism (IAKR)¹⁶⁹ has drawn on open-source evidence, geolocated photographs and videos, and interviews with people in the region, including individuals from al-Dahash's immediate environment, to verify the incident. Their investigation also reconstructed his participation in fighting between 18 and 20 January 2026 and found evidence of his affiliation with the SNA, as well as indications of an affiliation with ISIS. The IAKR places this incident in a broader context of attacks on women, attacks on Kurdish areas, documented killings, attacks against civilians, arbitrary arrests, torture, and other forms of mistreatment by STG-affiliated forces.

The FFT also reviewed another video referred to by various interviewees¹⁷⁰ and widely circulated online of the body of a woman member of the armed forces, Deniz Çiya, being thrown by a STG-affiliated fighter from a second-floor balcony, while a crowd of STG-affiliated forces can be heard shouting "Allahu Akbar" and cheering. Additional analysis of this incident, and further evidence of gendered mutilation of the dead and humiliation of the living, including

¹⁶⁶ Interviews A10 and X12.

¹⁶⁷ Interviews A10, X12, and X13.

¹⁶⁸ Interviews A7 and A10.

¹⁶⁹ Barî Şêran and Civan Akbulut, 'Der Spiegel, Der Islamist und eine Widersprüchliche Entlastungserzählung' (Informationsstelle Antikurdischer Rassismus 2026) <<https://antikurdischer-rassismus.de/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/IAKR-Recherchebericht-Nr.-I.pdf>>.

¹⁷⁰ Interviews A7 and A10.

stepping on the chests and faces of dead female fighters and sexualised threats and insults against captured women, is detailed in reports by RIC and Jineoloji Academy Rojava.¹⁷¹

Attacks on women's institutions and public role

As set out in Part II, the FFT received substantial evidence that individuals, institutions, community spaces, libraries, academies, and monuments associated with women's participation in public life were destroyed, looted, or forced to cease operating.

The FFT took detailed testimonies from 10 Kurdish and Arab women belonging to DAANES women's structures.¹⁷² These witnesses described the destruction and looting of Zenobia women's centres, Jineoloji institutions, and libraries in Aleppo, Tabqa, and Raqqa where women of all local ethnicities had worked together for women's rights, education, and empowerment. They provided the FFT with corroborating audiovisual evidence of resulting destruction. Interviewees also showed the FFT a video of a fighter sitting at a desk ripping up a document, saying, "For us, this is women's rights". The FFT has also seen widely circulated evidence of an incident referred to by interviewees in which, during the takeover by STG-aligned forces on 18 January 2026, armed factions and other men toppled the statue in Tabqa commemorating YPJ fighter Haboun Arab, a woman who was killed fighting ISIS in 2017.¹⁷³

Witnesses described these attacks as directed against the political project of the DAANES and the central role of women within it. Interviewees described the participation of women in politics, the justice system, women's organisations, education and research institutions, armed self-defence, and the "women's revolution" as being perceived as "an unlimited threat"¹⁷⁴ by forces aligned with the STG and Turkey. In that context, attacks on women's institutions were experienced as attacks on their equality, visibility, and agency.¹⁷⁵ One interviewee said: "*from the beginning those mercenaries did not accept this [project of women's liberation], even though as Arabs and Kurds we wanted to live together in safety*".¹⁷⁶ Another witness commented that the

¹⁷¹ Jineoloji Academy Rojava (n 6) 16–18; Rojava Information Center (n 8) 40–42.

¹⁷² Interviews A4, A5, A6, A10, X11, X12, and X13.

¹⁷³ Interview A4; Almasri (n 146); "التي أسقط السوريون تمثالها في مدينة الطبقة؟" (n 146).

¹⁷⁴ Interview X13.

¹⁷⁵ Interviews A7, A8, A10, and X13.

¹⁷⁶ Interview A5.

fact STG-aligned forces targeted women's institutions shows this was “not a war between two militaries but a war between two paradigms.”¹⁷⁷

Case study: Women's centres seized, pillaged, and occupied

One interviewee (A4) described the attacks on women's institutions as follows:

“There was a very successful project here, with the Autonomous Administration of our region. It was successful not only for Syria but would be for all the Middle East...what women gained in this area from her rights was very successful, but unfortunately everything is gone due to betrayal.

The project was successful for all people. Each region was run by its people. Decisions were taken by the people. It was a hope for all of Syria [...] We [women] had been as slaves. We were liberated. We became leaders. We joined parties. We trained women. We represented communities. We became important people. We had a very important role in the community. How will we go back to being slaves again with the mentality of HTS led by Ahmed Sharaa?

They openly broke the statues of women, they removed the slogans of the women's movement from walls. They do this openly and there is no representation of women in their system or anything they do. This is open, not only in our region but all of Syria. There are no women in the constitutional committee or decision-making committees. [...]

We cannot live this life. We do not want to stay this way. There is hope we will return to our offices. Our offices were occupied and looted. But we have hope. We have many members, we empowered many women. We all want to return to work, we cannot believe we will stay like this – this is not life.”

Women also described being subjected to gendered insults and threats on the basis of the way they were dressed when stopped by STG-aligned fighters as areas came under their control.¹⁷⁸ There was a pattern in the evidence collected by the FFT of women connected to local administration, women's structures, and civil society in the DAANES being targeted through death threats, personal information being published on social media, obstruction of access to medical care, and seizure and occupation of their homes and offices.¹⁷⁹

The impact of family separation

The separation of men from women and children during evacuation and detention also had a gendered impact. Women were left to care for children in displacement, often without

¹⁷⁷ Interview A10.

¹⁷⁸ Interview X13.

¹⁷⁹ Interviews A6, A8, A10, and X13.

information about detained, disappeared, or killed male relatives. This compounded the harms caused by forced displacement, as detailed in Part 12 of this report.¹⁸⁰

Impunity for gender-based rights violations

Many witnesses expressed concerns about impunity for gender-based rights violations in particular. Members of justice institutions compared the central role of women in DAANES community-based justice structures and efforts to combat gender-based violence, with the STG's centralised justice system built on religion, excluding women's participation and currently headed by a Minister of Justice alleged to have killed a woman in Idlib and then claimed it was God's will.¹⁸¹ Similarly, the IAKR investigation characterises the attacks on women detailed above as part of what it describes as the misogynistic character of a radical Islamist ideology associated with the STG and allied forces, also referring to previous alleged abuses against women under al-Sharaa and HTS in Idlib. A witness describing women from the Jineolojî academies collecting evidence in January 2026 of violations they themselves were living through stated:

“The working group documented these crimes with persistence, often while crying. This was because the Kurdish people have repeatedly faced massacres throughout history, and many of those historical moments were never properly documented. The lessons learned from these experiences have become a collective understanding that every event must be recorded and shared with the public.”¹⁸²

In a communication to the Syrian Arab Republic on 27 April 2026, reports of violence against women and girls in northern Aleppo and NES, including allegations of killings, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture and ill-treatment, forced displacement, deprivation of food and medical care, and attacks on civilians and civilian objects were raised by the UN Special Rapporteurs on violence against women; enforced or involuntary disappearance; extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; adequate housing; the human rights of internally displaced persons; minority issues and the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. The communication requested information from the STG within 60 days on measures taken since January 2026 to prevent and respond to gender-based rights violations; locate disappeared persons; ensure access to

¹⁸⁰ Interviews A2, A8, X2, and X4.

¹⁸¹ Interview A7.

¹⁸² Interview X13.

essential services; and ensure transparent, impartial investigations into violations in line with international standards. To date the STG has not provided any response.¹⁸³

Analysis

In the assessment of the FFT, the evidence provides reasonable grounds to believe that many violations by STG-aligned forces analysed in this report had a distinct gendered basis.

The evidence also shows that women were targeted for violations of IHL including through threats of death or abuse, obstruction of medical treatment, occupation and looting of homes and offices, arbitrary detention, and violence because they were women, Kurdish women, or women perceived as affiliated with DAANES political and social institutions or defence and security forces. The FFT therefore finds there are reasonable grounds to believe that STG-aligned forces perpetrated targeted violations against both civilian women and women fighters taking no active part in hostilities, on the basis of their gender as women or on the basis of their combined characteristics of gender, race or ethnicity as Kurdish women or imputed political affiliation as women connected with the DAANES. This constitutes adverse distinction in the application of IHL contrary to Common Article 3 and ICRC Rule 88.

In particular, the evidence of mutilation and desecration of women's bodies, cutting of women's hair, public circulation of images of abused women, and gendered and sexual threats amounts to a pattern of gender-based outrages upon personal dignity as a war crime (within the definition set out in Part 9 of this report). Additionally, the evidence of the targeting of women's institutions and monuments by STG-aligned forces constitutes a pattern of gender-based seizure, destruction, and looting of institutions dedicated to education, history, and culture as a war crime (within the definition set out in Part 11 of this report). Other violations, including forced displacement, had a disproportionately gendered impact.

The compelling evidence of Rami Al-Dahash deliberately removing a particular bodily feature from a Kurdish woman and publicly displaying it, while explicitly invoking her identity as a Kurdish female fighter, constitutes not only an outrage on personal dignity but evidence of discriminatory intent on intersecting gender, racial and ethnic, and political grounds. The pattern in the evidence of women fighters' bodies being mutilated in the same way, and

¹⁸³ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Communication Report and Search' (2026) <<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TmSearch/RelCom?code=SYR+I%2F2026>>.

otherwise desecrated, further supports a finding of broader discriminatory intent. This is relevant to establishing a crime against humanity of persecution on the ground of gender under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute.

Insofar as the relevant contextual elements were met as set out in Part 5 of this report, on the available evidence the FFT considers there are reasonable grounds to believe that STG-aligned forces committed the crime against humanity under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute of persecution on the grounds of gender – combined in appropriate cases with Kurdish race or ethnicity or political affiliation – in connection with the war crimes detailed above, including outrages on personal dignity and pillage.

Part 14 Accountability

The evidence gathered by the FFT demonstrates not only the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law, but also the absence of any realistic prospect that domestic institutions in Syria can provide accountability for those crimes. Interviewees from the Social Justice Council of the Jazira Region (which supervises the justice system in the largest part of North and East Syria that remains under the control of the DAANES) described domestic justice mechanisms as unable to investigate or prosecute the crimes documented in this report. They explained that the process of integration with the STG has left local courts without effective authority over forces aligned with the STG, while justice institutions in areas now under STG control are either unavailable to victims or lack independence. The Social Justice Council of the Jazira Region described previous transitional justice processes as ineffective, noting that only a very small number of perpetrators had been tried despite far larger numbers of documented violations.¹⁸⁴

This absence of domestic accountability is particularly serious given the nature and scale of the crimes documented by the FFT. The evidence reviewed by the FFT identifies direct perpetrators from multiple armed factions, including the SAA, Turkish-backed groups under the banner of the SNA, HTS, and ISIS-linked sleeper cells, as well as evidence indicating coordination, support, or acquiescence by senior political and military actors in the STG. Local institutions, civil society organisations, and lawyers have collected survivor testimony, video material, and documentary evidence, but they lack the jurisdiction, security, and resources necessary to secure criminal responsibility. Victims and witnesses also face displacement, loss of documentation, lack of access to courts, and a fear of reprisals. In these circumstances, accountability cannot be left to domestic mechanisms alone.

There is an urgent need for international accountability mechanisms capable of investigating and prosecuting individual perpetrators, including those in command positions who ordered, enabled, failed to prevent, or failed to punish the crimes described in this report. Such mechanisms should include international courts and tribunals, the use of universal jurisdiction by national courts where available, and support for independent evidence preservation and witness protection.

¹⁸⁴ Interview A7.

Part 15 Recommendations

In light of the serious violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law detailed in this report, and the lack of availability of an effective domestic remedy as set out above, the FFT calls on the following actors to take the measures as set out below.

The Syrian Transitional Government

Protect civilians and civilian objects

- Immediately cease unlawful attacks against civilians and civilian objects.
- Fully comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack.
- Prevent further discriminatory violations against civilians on the basis of their ethnicity, gender, religion, or actual or perceived political affiliation.

Medical infrastructure, personnel, and the wounded and sick

- Respect the protection afforded under international humanitarian law to hospitals, medical centres, medical personnel, and ambulances.
- Cease obstruction of medical assistance and medical evacuations.
- Ensure that the wounded and sick have access to necessary medical care without adverse distinction or delay.
- Undertake a specific, transparent examination of the condition of hospitals damaged or destroyed, in particular in the Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood, and make findings public.
- Facilitate access by independent international medical and humanitarian organisations to inspect these hospitals and to meet witnesses to the events.

Persons deprived of liberty and missing persons

- Release all persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty.

- Record the identity, place of detention, and legal status of all persons deprived of their liberty, and inform their families.
- Ensure that persons deprived of liberty have access to a lawyer, communication with their families, adequate food and water, and necessary medical care.
- End torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, coerced confessions, hostage-taking, and ransom practices.
- Effectively and independently investigate allegations of enforced disappearance and cases of persons whose whereabouts remain unknown, and clarify their fate and whereabouts of missing persons.

Protection of the bodies of the dead and human dignity

- Take measures to prevent the mutilation, destruction, or degrading display of the bodies of the dead, and prevent the dissemination of such images.
- Conduct an effective investigation into allegations that bodies have been withheld or returned in exchange for ransom, and ensure public access to information concerning such investigations.
- Take the necessary measures to identify the dead, return their remains to their families, and enable burial in a manner consistent with human dignity.

Forcible displacement, return, and property rights

- Create the conditions necessary for forcibly displaced persons to return voluntarily, safely, sustainably, and with dignity to their homes or places of habitual residence.
- End practices that obstruct return on the basis of ethnicity, gender, religion, or political affiliation.
- Restore unlawfully seized or occupied homes and other property to their lawful owners.
- Establish effective mechanisms for the return of looted or seized personal belongings, identity documents, and other property, and provide appropriate reparation where restitution is not possible.

Investigation, accountability, and preservation of evidence

- Conduct independent, impartial, and effective investigations into the serious violations and international crimes documented in this report.
- Ensure that investigations are not limited to direct perpetrators, but also examine the potential individual criminal responsibility of those who ordered, encouraged, facilitated, or enabled the crimes, as well as persons in command or decision-making positions who failed to fulfil their obligations to prevent or punish crimes.
- Ensure the preservation of physical, digital, medical, forensic, and documentary evidence.
- Prevent victims, witnesses, lawyers, journalists, medical personnel, and persons documenting violations from being subjected to pressure, intimidation, or reprisals.
- Provide public information on investigations and prosecutions conducted to date, and make information available for scrutiny by the media and the legal community, subject to the requirements of victim and witness protection and the integrity of any proceedings.

Victims' rights and reparation

- Ensure survivors and the families of victims have access to truth, effective remedy, and appropriate reparation.
- Establish effective mechanisms encompassing restitution of property, compensation, rehabilitation, clarification of the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, and measures aimed at guarantees of non-recurrence.

Other states providing military, logistical, financial, or other support**Turkey**

Given the specific findings in this report on the possible involvement of Turkish military personnel, Turkish military equipment, and Turkish interrogators in violations, Turkey must:

- Ensure that these allegations are investigated independently, effectively, and impartially.

- Preserve relevant information, records, and other evidence in relation to credible allegations that its personnel or persons within its jurisdiction may have been involved in violations of international law.
- Co-operate with competent national and international investigative and accountability mechanisms.

States that provide material support to the STG, including Turkey, the United States of America, France, Germany, other European Union member states, and the United Kingdom

- Take effective measures to ensure that military, financial, logistical, or other support they provide to the STG is not used to commit violations of international humanitarian law and international crimes.
- Use influence available to them to promote compliance with international humanitarian law by actors to which they provide material support.
- Preserve all relevant information and evidence in their possession concerning possible international crimes and co-operate, in accordance with law, with competent independent investigative authorities.

United Nations bodies and international accountability mechanisms

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

- Address the events of January and February 2026 documented in this report as part of its ongoing monitoring and investigative work.
- In particular, follow up on attacks against civilians, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, torture and ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, attacks on persons no longer taking an active part in hostilities, pillage, forcible displacement, and gender-based rights violations.

The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic

- Ensure the secure preservation and analysis of relevant evidence collected in connection with this report and by local actors.
- Support and facilitate the use of such evidence in future national or international criminal investigations and prosecutions.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant UN Special Procedures

- Follow up, within respective mandates, on findings concerning torture and ill-treatment, enforced or involuntary disappearances, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, the human rights of internally displaced persons, minority issues, and violence against women.
- Continue to seek concrete information from the Syrian authorities and other relevant actors concerning the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, the situation of persons deprived of liberty, investigations undertaken, and measures adopted to protect victims and witnesses.

Other relevant UN mechanisms

- Examine the discriminatory dimensions of the documented violations on the basis of ethnicity, gender, and perceived political affiliation, including where these grounds intersect.
- Support the ability of victims and witnesses to co-operate safely with international mechanisms.
- Seek access and co-operation from relevant actors for independent international investigation and monitoring processes.

States and competent national investigative and prosecutorial authorities

- Consider making use of jurisdiction over alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria, including universal jurisdiction where available.
- Where suspects are present within their jurisdiction, or where another valid jurisdictional nexus exists, assess credible information and, where the applicable legal requirements are met, open investigations.
- Strengthen the capacity of specialised investigative and prosecutorial units dealing with international crimes.
- Enable victims and witnesses present in their territories to give evidence safely and to access justice.
- Continue to cooperate with the IIIM and other competent international accountability mechanisms.
- Provide the political, financial, and technical support necessary to enable independent international investigative and accountability mechanisms to continue their work.

International and regional human rights organisations, bar associations, and legal organisations

- International and regional human rights organisations, bar associations, lawyers' organisations, legal associations, and relevant professional networks are encouraged to continue monitoring the violations documented in this report and the steps taken, or not taken, towards accountability.
- Particular attention should be given to the situation of victims and witnesses, as well as lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders, and local civil society actors involved in documenting violations. Where threats, pressure, or reprisals are reported, these should be documented and brought to the attention of the relevant national and international mechanisms.
- Organisations working on detention, torture, and enforced disappearance should continue to follow the situation of persons detained or missing following the events of

January and February 2026 and, where their mandates permit, seek independent access to places of detention.

- Relevant legal organisations and bar associations should also follow any national or international investigations and proceedings arising from the events documented in this report.
- In States in which universal jurisdiction or another basis of jurisdiction may be available, organisations with relevant expertise may assist in identifying appropriate legal avenues and in ensuring that available evidence is transmitted securely and lawfully to competent authorities.
- Continued cooperation with local lawyers, human rights organisations, women's organisations, and other documentation initiatives in North and East Syria will also be important, particularly in relation to the preservation of evidence and support for victims and witnesses.

Given the continuing uncertainty concerning missing persons, persons deprived of liberty, and the prospects for safe return of those displaced, international monitoring should not end with the publication of this report.

Appendix I: Acronyms

DAANES – Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

HTS – Hay’at Tahreer al-Sham. Also HTŞ (Kurmanji Kurdish).

ICC – International Criminal Court.

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross.

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Also ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), DAESH (Arabic).

IHL – International Humanitarian Law.

SAA – Syrian Arab Army.

SDF – Syrian Democratic Forces.

SNA – Syrian National Army.

STG – Syrian Transitional Government.

YPJ – Women’s Protection Forces.

YPG – People’s Protection Forces.

Appendix II Place names

Abu Khashab, village on the White Road, at 35.946443° N, 40.021959° E.

Afrin, also Afrîn or Efrin. City and region in Northwest Syria.

Aleppo, also Heleb (Kurmanji Kurdish). Second largest city in Syria.

Al-Karamah. Town on the White Road, with a checkpoint at 35.877895° N, 39.270246° E.

Ashrafiyah, also Eşrefiyê (Kurmanji Kurdish), or Ashrafiyeh or Ashrafieh. Mixed neighbourhood in Aleppo with a significant Kurdish population.

Deir Hafer, also Dayr Hafir. Town in the Aleppo area, on the road from Aleppo to Tabqa.

Deir-ez-Zor. City in Eastern Syria, on the Euphrates.

Heseke, also Al-Hasakah (Arabic), Heseke or Hesîçe (Kurmanji Kurdish), or Hasakah. Largest city in Northeast Syria.

Jazira, also Jazeera. Region of Northeast Syria containing the cities of Heseke and Qamishlo.

Khaled Fajer Hospital, also Nexweşxaneya Şehîd Xalid Fecir (Kurmanji Kurdish), Khaled Fajr, Xaled Fajr, or Khalid Fajr. Last hospital operating in Sheikh Maqsoud, Aleppo.

Kobani, also Kobanê or Kobanî (Kurmanji Kurdish) or Ayn al-Arab (Arabic). City in Northern Syria on the border with Turkey.

Qamishlo, also Qamişlo (Kurmanji Kurdish) or Qamishli (Arabic). The second largest city in Northeast Syria, located on the border with Turkey.

Sabah al-Khair, also Saba Al Khair, Saba Al Hey, or Sabahul Hayr. A checkpoint or village on the White Road, at 36.069218° N, 39.814966° E.

Sheikh Maqsoud, also Şêx Meqsûd (Kurmanji Kurdish) or Sheikh Maqsood, al-Sheikh Maqsoud, Maqsud, or Maksud. Kurdish neighbourhood in Aleppo.

The White Road, also Aleppo-Heseke Road or Abyad Road. The road from Raqqa, through Al-Karamah, through Sabah al-Khair, to Heseke.

Appendix III: Interviews

ID	Date	Location	Participants	Gender	Age	Military status	Summary
A1	23/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Civilian	Witness to events in Sheikh Maqsoud, 10 January 2026.
A7	23/02/2026	Qamishlo	2	Mixed	Adult	Civilian	Local judges evidencing the inability of the justice system to deal with abuses.
A8	23/02/2026	Qamishlo	7	Mixed	Adult	Civilian	Local government and representatives involved in the housing of displaced civilians.
A9	23/02/2026	Qamishlo	11	Mixed	Adult	Civilian	Lawyers and representatives of six civil society organisations involved in documenting crimes.
B1	23/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Female	Adult	Civilian (prison guard)	Mother of B2. Survivor of events on the Raqqa-Heseke road, 18 January 2026.
B2	23/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Civilian (prison guard)	Son of B1. Witness to bodies on Raqqa-Heseke road, 17 January 2026.
A2	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Civilian	Witness to events in Sheikh Maqsoud, 11-12 January 2026.
A3	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Female	Adult	Civilian	Victim of shootings on the Raqqa-Heseke road, 17-18 January 2026.
B3	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Civilian	Survivor of events in Sheikh Maqsoud, 7-13 January 2026.
B4	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Civilian	Brother of B5. Survivor of a shooting on Raqqa-Heseke road, 19 January 2026.
B5	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Civilian	Brother of B4. Survivor of a shooting on Raqqa-Heseke road, 19 January 2026.
B7	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Civilian	Survivor of events in Sheikh Maqsoud, 7-10 January 2026.
X1	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Civilian	Brother of X2. Survivor of events in Sheikh Maqsoud, 6-10 January 2026.
X2	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Female	Child	Civilian	Sister of X1. Survivor of events in Sheikh Maqsoud, 6-10 January 2026.
X3	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Female	Adult	Civilian	Witness to death of her husband, 18-21 January 2026.
X4	24/02/2026	Qamishlo	5	Mixed	Mixed	Civilian	Family survivors of events in Heseke, 18-19 January 2026.

APPENDIX III: INTERVIEWS

ID	Date	Location	Participants	Gender	Age	Military status	Summary
A4	25/02/2026	Remote	1	Female	Adult	Civilian	Witness to events in Raqqa and the Raqqa-Heseke road, 17-20 January 2026.
A5	25/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Female	Adult	Civilian	Witness to events on the Raqqa-Heseke road, 18-19 January 2026.
A6	25/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Female	Adult	Civilian	Witness to events in Raqqa, home looted, relatives dead on the Raqqa-Heseke road, 18-19 January 2026.
A10	25/02/2026	Qamishlo	5	Females	Adult	Civilian	Academics involved in gathering testimonies from victims.
B6	25/02/2026	Qamishlo	1	Male	Adult	Armed (SDF) forces	Survivor of a shooting on Serekaniye-Heseke road, 9 February 2026.
B8	25/02/2026	Heseke	2	Mixed	Adult	Civilian	Hospital management providing description of their work in January and February 2026.
B9	25/02/2026	Qamishlo	5	Male	Adult	Civilian	Hospital management providing description of their work in January and February 2026.
X11	28/02/2026	Withheld	1	Female	Adult	Civilian	Received threats, and witnessed murder on Raqqa-Deir-ez-Zor road.
X12	28/02/2026	Withheld	1	Female	Adult	Civilian	Witnessed mutilation of bodies.
X13	28/02/2026	Withheld	1	Female	Adult	Civilian	Witnessed the displacement of civilians.
X5	12/03/2026	Withheld	1	Male	Adult	Civilian	Civilian who survived detention after takeover of Sheikh Maqsoud.
X6	12/03/2026	Withheld	1	Male	Adult	Armed (police) forces	Asayiş member who survived detention after capture in Sheikh Maqsoud on 9 January 2026.
X7	12/03/2026	Withheld	1	Male	Adult	Armed (police) forces	Asayiş member who survived detention after capture in Sheikh Maqsoud on 9 January 2026.
X8	12/03/2026	Withheld	1	Male	Adult	Armed (police) forces	Injured asayiş member who survived detention after capture in Sheikh Maqsoud on 9 January 2026.
X9	12/03/2026	Withheld	1	Male	Adult	Armed (police) forces	Asayiş member who survived detention after capture in Sheikh Maqsoud on 9 January 2026.
X10	15/03/2026	Remote	1	Male	Adult	Armed (police) forces	Traffic and security officer who was detained in Aleppo prior to the end of the fighting in January 2026.

PHOTO CREDIT

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