

Information Center of Afrin Resistance



Weekly News Bulletin from Afrin

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The Information Center of Afrin Resistance is providing direct information from the inside of Afrin. Since the 26th January 2018 we report up-to-date about the invasion and war crimes of the Turkish state and the resistance of the people in Afrin.

This is the weekly summary of the developments in and around Afrin.

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The Developments in Afrin 16th-22th March, 2018

Introduction

With the defeat of the IS in Syria and especially after the liberation of Raqqa in October 2017, the Turkish state intensified its threats and attacks on the Democratic Confederation of Northern Syria. On this background the Turkish occupation war on Afrin started the 20th January 2018 violating international law and the sovereignty of its neighbour country. The Turkish army has launched this war in cooperation with jihadist groups of the FSA ranks. Many of them are former Al-Qaida or IS members.

Last week's Developments inside Afrin

After 58 day of resistance against the second biggest army of the NATO, the phase changed. As the Turkish army and its jihadist allies heavily bombed the city and the civilian infrastructures, the number of civilians casualties rapidly increased, as well as the destructions inside the city. The siege of Afrin city confronted the people, the self-administration and defence forces with the concrete danger of even larger massacres. According to the people's will, on March 18th the majority of the city's population left the town centre and was evacuated in order to avoid a physical genocide. YPG / YPJ forces continued the resistance against the occupying forces by using guerilla warfare tactics. Until now, neither the international community has intervened nor the UNCHR has sent humanitarian aid to Afrin's people.

War and Humanitarian Situation

Since March 14th, the whole Afrin city had been under heavy bombardments and constantly overflight by Turkish warplanes and drones controlling the whole area. About 500 thousand people were still in the city. By bombing and shelling the Turkish army and its jihadist allies targeted civilians. Each day more than a dozen of civilian casualties – men, women and children – were reported from the town and different districts of Afrin. Essential infrastructures were destroyed systematically as well as telecommunication antenna, private houses and cars. Especially, water tanks were targeted which were vital for the population as the water-pipes of Meydanke dam were already cut-off last week by occupying forces. A disastrous health care situation emerged, because Afrin Hospital was overwhelmed by the huge number of civilians killed or injured. In the night of March 16th, Turkish army directly targeted Afrin Hospital killing at least 16 and injuring dozens of civilians. On March 17th, the Turkish army released a drone footage allegedly proving they never would have hit the civilian hospital. But photos and videos from local sources show the opposite. Also an independent investigation by the citizens journalism website Bellingcat¹ proved the Turkish air-raid on Afrin Hospital. Kurdish Red Crescent members claimed that they have been targeted by the bombardments as well while trying to rescue victims of war.

The intensifying direct attacks on civilians, the rising number of casualties and the massacre in Afrin city killing at least 47 civilians on March 16th alerted the population and self-administration of Afrin to take precaution to prevent further massacres. Refugee convoys leaving the town were shelled and bombarded again throughout their way towards Shebah region. On March 17th, a refugee convoy was targeted by the Turkish army on its way to Jindirese. Witnesses reported that about 250-300 civilians were massacred just in this incident.

1 <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2018/03/19/did-turkey-bomb-afrin-hospital/>

Evacuation of Afrin City and Press Conference of Self-Administration

In Shehba Canton the representatives of the Democratic Self-Administration of Afrin, YPG / YPJ and Kongra Star, gave a press statements about the latest developments which were live broadcasted at the Kurdish TV Channel Ronahi TV on March 18th.

“The resistance of North Syria's peoples has been a joint resistance. In order not to become victims of genocide, a big part of Afrin`s population came to Sherawa and Sheba. This does not mean that we have given up Afrin. The resistance continues”, stated the Co-Chair of Afrin Council Asman Sheik Isa.

The spokesperson of the People’s Defence Forces YPG, Brusk Haseke: "We have not withdrawn from Afrin. We took precaution to save the lives of civilian that have been subjected to unlimited massacres. YPG/ YPJ are present in all districts of Afrin and will continue the struggle. We promise to our people that we will not leave our land and our people to the occupiers. So far our concern was to protect the people. Now, we are ready for new offences to free Afrin."

Co-Chair of Afrin Council, Hevi Mistafa: "We have neither given up Afrin nor our hope. For 56 days the people have resisted against cruel military attacks of the occupiers. For saving the lives of our people, together we came to Sherawa and Sheba. The resistance continues everywhere. The silence of the international community is responsible for the increasing brutality of Erdogan’s attacks. He occupied first Cerablus, then Bab and then attacked Afrin. No voice was raised against this. This is not only a danger for Afrin, but for the whole world."

In an interview released on March 21th by ANF News², YPG Spokesperson Nuri Mahmoud confirmed that Afrin was not evacuated as a result of any deals, but due to the decision of Afrin’s people who came face to face with genocide: “Our forces also participated in this decision. It was important to move the people to a safe area. The resistance is not over with the exit of our people. Right now, our fight in Afrin continues. Afrin will never be a safe place for invaders. We will continue with our struggle until Afrin is free.”

Situation of Refugees from Afrin in Shehba region

Since almost the whole population of Afrin Canton got displaced during days of intense fightings and bombardments, keeping the precise records of the number of refugees and their whereabouts is very difficult. The work to obtain these kinds of data are still continuing. After March 18th, the majority of refugees has gathered in Sherawa and Shehba region (Til Rifaat). According to the Self-administration more than 200,000 fled Afrin city in the days of March 18th.³ According to UNCHR 104,000 people fled from Afrin city in the course of the last escalation: 75,000 reached Til Rifaat, 29,000 Nubol and Zahraa (regime areas) and 10,000 stranded in Az-Zayra, attempting to no avail to cross Syrian regime areas⁴. However, the situation on the ground is critical. Although the councils of Shehba Canton work day and night to meet the needs of the refugees, the capacity of the canton is insufficient. The number of people evacuated to Shehba is well above their own number of inhabitants.

The people of Afrin are in urgent need of electricity, food, water, milk for children and health-promoting measures. Now they are struggling to build up a new life with the few things they have

2 <https://anfenglish.com/features/ypg-spokesperson-erdogan-is-expanding-with-ransom-from-the-west-25633>

3 <http://www.businessinsider.com/turkeys-afrin-offensive-in-syria-reportedl-made-200000-homeless-2018-3?r=UK&IR=T>

4 <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2018/3/5ab0d5b64/fierce-fighting-eastern-ghouta-rural-damascus-afrin-causes-massive-new.html>

in tents, empty houses, shops and patios^{5 6}. However, until now no humanitarian aid from UNCHR reached Shehba region to help the self-administration and the refugees.

Turkish-jihadist occupation of Afrin

On March 18th the Turkish army and the jihadist forces entered Afrin city. Countless videos show their forces inside the city looting^{7 8}, detaining⁹ and threatening¹⁰ people, as well as the presence of Leopard tanks provided by Germany to the Turkish army. The occupying forces destroyed symbols of Kurdish culture like the statue of Smith Kawa, the symbol of people's Newroz resistance against the tyrant Dehaq. The bodies of YPJ fighter Nudem and YPG fighter Muhammed from Kantere (Mabata district) were beheaded and their mutilated bodies exposed on the road. Under the "Takbir - Allahuakbar!" shouts of the Jihadists¹¹, the Turkish army raised Turkish flags - making the occupation of Afrin by a NATO member official.

'The Washington Post' journalist David Ignatius wrote: "Seeing the photographs of pro-Turkish Islamist militiamen strutting about the center of Afrin on Sunday, it seemed eerily possible that jihadist allies of the Islamic State were back in control in northern Syria, thanks to our "NATO ally" Turkey."¹²

Until writing this Bulletin, new evidences of ongoing looting, killing, tortures and detaining of civilians have been arriving from Afrin city. The Turkish army and its jihadist allies have banned entry in and departure from Afrin city. They force young men either to join FSA or go to prison. These threats are considered to be geared towards changing the demography of the city. In fact, the Turkish regime has repeatedly stated that it wants to settle refugees from Turkey now in Afrin region. European Union funds are also being used to realise this.¹³

Resistance against Occupation

In Sherawa district – especially around the villages Berade, Baya and Kimara – still heavy clashes are continuing, as Turkish army and its jihadist allies attack positions of SDF/YPG/YPJ protecting Afrin's people sheltered in Sherawa and Sheheba district. On March 20th and 21st, heavy clashes erupted in Berade village (Sherawa district). The Turkish army shelled the village causing the destruction of historical buildings, an ancient church and historical artefacts from the Roman period¹⁴. On March 21st, civilians lost their lives due to Turkish army's bombing on Baya village. Between Baya and Kimara villages, YPG fighters destroyed a hostile military vehicle and killed 5 members of the occupying forces¹⁵. Kimara village is an Ezidi village. So after the ISIS attack on Shingal in 2014 Ezidi people in Afrin are again facing the threat of massacre¹⁶.

5 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/people-of-afrin-settle-in-shehba-with-promises-of-revenge-25620>

6 <https://twitter.com/ICafrinresist/status/976381245071548416>

7 <https://twitter.com/mutludc/status/962373424655032320>

8 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/world-middle-east-43457214>

9 <https://twitter.com/mustefaebdi/status/975662524841578496>

10 <https://twitter.com/ICafrinresist/status/976189285878718464>

11 <https://twitter.com/abdbozkurt/status/975678376882200576>

12 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/amhtml/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2018/03/18/the-turks-have-taken-afrin-lets-not-let-manbij-fall-next/>

13 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/turkish-army-bans-entry-to-afrin-25605>

14 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/turkish-army-bombs-a-village-in-afrin-s-sherawa-district-25646>

15 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/ypg-sources-5-invaders-were-killed-in-sherawa-25637>

16 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/ezidis-in-sherawa-face-threat-of-massacre-25615>

Between March 18th and 20th, YPG carried out sabotage actions in Afrin city, Jindirese, Bilbile, Rajo and Shera districts¹⁷. In Afrin City, YPG fighters targeted occupying forces while they were looting civilians property. As a result, 16 members of the occupying forces got killed and 7 wounded. On Jindirese road, YPG targeted a position of the occupying forces killing 28 soldiers or jihadist and destroying an armoured vehicle. Further, two different actions between Bilbil and Rajo districts resulted in the deaths of 21 members of the occupying forces.

On March 20th, in Alamdarah village, an armoured vehicle was destroyed (video footage^{18 19}). Heavy clashes also reported from Meydanke and Meshale villages (Shera district).

On March 21st, a YPG action with ATGM rockets resulted in the destruction of a military pick-up truck in Bilbil district²⁰.

Two Internationalist Women Engaged in the Defence of Afrin: Anna Campbell and Legerin Çiya

On the March 15th, the internationalist YPJ fighter Anna Campbell (Helîn Qereçox) originating from UK lost her life when the Turkish army bombardments targeted their convoy. Anna Campbell had said about the attacks on Afrin: “Daesh is only one face of the exploitative and fascist system. Those who occupy Afrin are one with Daesh. Those who attack Afrin share the same mentality as Daesh. The second largest NATO army is behind them. Our comrades are leading a great resistance and show great sacrifices. We are facing a bigger enemy than ever before. It is an honour to me to be fighting alongside heroic warriors.”²¹ Anna Campbell’s father called upon the UK government “to negotiate a ceasefire so that my daughter’s body can be retrieved along with the bodies of all who have been killed in Afrin since the Turkish offensive began.”²²

On March 17th, Alina Sanchez (Lêgerîn Çiya), originating from Argentina lost her life in a car accident in Haseke when she was travelling to a meeting with NGOs and health organizations in order to establish connections to support the displaced people of Afrin²³. During her stay in Rojava she was involved in YPJ medic teams saving the life of many fighter injured in clashes with ISIS. She especially dedicate herself to contribute to the establishment of an alternative health system in Rojava and to connect women’s freedom struggles internationally.

Solidarity with Afrin

Since March 16th, actions and mobilisations in solidarity with Afrin grew and spread day by day with increasing creativity. On March 18th, 10 politicians, journalists and the football player Deniz Naki²⁴ started an indefinite hunger strike in front of the United Nations (UN) Geneva Offices to urge the UN to take action against the Turkish occupation of Afrin. In France, hundreds of Kurdish children boycotted schools and marched in solidarity with the children of Afrin²⁵. In Rome, Italy, protesters tried to reach Turkey embassy and clashes with the police erupted²⁶.

17 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/74-members-of-invading-forces-killed-in-afrin-25616>

18 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/ypg-hits-turkish-armored-vehicle-in-border-region-25571>

19 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/ammunition-loaded-vehicle-destroyed-in-afrin-s-bilbile-district-25595>

20 <https://anfenglish.com/rojava/ypg-fighters-destroy-military-vehicle-in-bilbile-25644>

21 <https://www.ypirojava.org/To-the-public>

22 <https://twitter.com/dirkmcampbell/status/976549008461258752>

23 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/women/ypj-fighter-from-latin-america-dies-in-traffic-accident-25660>

24 <https://www.welt.de/sport/article174757747/Deniz-Naki-Fussballer-im-Hungerstreik-Erdogan-ist-ein-Voelkerrechtsbrecher.html>

25 <https://anfenglish.com/news/kurdish-students-boycott-schools-in-france-for-afrin-s-children-25621>

26 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXi2x3yXvt4>

In Crete and Greece protesters occupied the Germany embassy to protest against Germany's complicity with Turkish State²⁷. In many countries and many cities diverse civil society organisations and platforms organised marches, hunger-strikes and protests like in UK, France, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Greece, Switzerland, Belgium, Poland and Australia. Moreover, the 2018 Newroz celebrations which were dedicated to the Afrin resistance united the people all over the world. In Northern Kurdistan (Turkey) and Eastern Kurdistan (Iran), in many towns hundreds of thousands of people gathered despite state repression and arrests.

For March 24th, the World Afrin Day is planned as an international action day. Meetings and big demonstrations are expected all over the world.

Statements and analysis

In general, official statements condemning Turkey's invasion and occupation of Afrin are increasing. Speaking at the German parliament, Merkel said that the operation Turkey has been carrying out in Afrin is unacceptable and she condemns it in the strongest way²⁸.

Federica Mogherini, EU foreign policy chief, expressed concerns about Turkey and FSA occupying Afrin²⁹. With respect to the civilian population that still remains in Afrin, the president of the ICRC, Peter Maurer, said: "...the credibility of a Turkish Red Crescent working in Afrin with the Kurdish population is close to zero"³⁰.

As Turkish threats now extend to Kobane, Qamishlo and Shingal, Turkey officials claimed to have reached an agreement with the US over Minbij. However, the US State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert said: "Well, that's funny, because no agreement has been reached."³¹

US Secretary of State is changing; Rex Tillerson is going to leave place to Mike Pompeo. Rex Tillerson had a leading role in the discussion process with Turkey about Syria, Afrin and Minbij. Therefore, this change could be related to differences on strategical interests of USA and Turkish aggression policy against Northern Syria. At least, it can be assumed that it might cause a delay in any possible agreement or discussion.

27 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-germany-consulate-attacks/protesters-storm-german-consulate-on-greek-island-of-crete-idUSKCN1GS1JE>

28 <http://m.bianet.org/english/world/195382-merkel-afrin-operation-is-unacceptable>

29 <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/703f605f-fa41-4a83-a90b-4d568cef2d1c>

30 <https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN1GV124>

31 <http://theregion.org/article/13081-us-ridicules-turkish-president-spokesperson-on-manbij>