

**Turkey targets civilians' houses,
workplaces in NE Syria**



Introduction and Methodology

Turkey directly targeted civilians with drones and heavy weapons while they were in their houses and workplaces or on the way to work in Northeast Syria.

Statistics and documentations of the Monitoring and Documentation Department of North Press Agency since the beginning of 2023 have shown that Turkish forces expanded their target area, endangering the lives of civilians in areas held by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). Turkish threats against civilians persisted even while performing daily activities in their houses and work.

Even though Turkey signed two ceasefire agreements with both the U.S. and Russia after carrying out a military operation dubbed Peace Spring in October 2019, it continued to carry out attacks using artillery shelling, drones, and warplanes.

In relation to the cases presented in this report, Turkey has not demonstrated its compliance with the International Humanitarian Law, human rights treaties and laws that protect civilians during times of conflict.

In addition to general statistics, this report provides four different cases in time and place, showing that Turkish forces targeted civilians' houses, their workplaces and vehicles, and carried out indiscriminate shelling where shrapnel killed civilians in places they considered safe.

From August to December, the Department conducted physical interviews with 42 individuals, including survivors of the attacks, families of victims, human rights advocates,

and activists. Additionally, families and workers in civilian facilities that were damaged also were interviewed.

Some testimonies and interviews were conducted before preparing this report. They revealed that Turkish attacks became more hostile against the region and the civilian population using artillery shells and drones.

The report includes four parts:

First: General statistics and spike in Turkey’s hostility through expanding its target area, even against humanitarian efforts.

Second: Turkey’s targeting of facilities and infrastructure resulted in long-term damages affecting the entire population of the region that already suffers from dire services and living conditions after 12 years of war and conflict in the country.

Third: Direct attacks against civilians caused casualties and gravely impacted vulnerable groups such as agricultural workers and low-income laborers, despite being present in their houses, workplaces, and traveling on main roads.

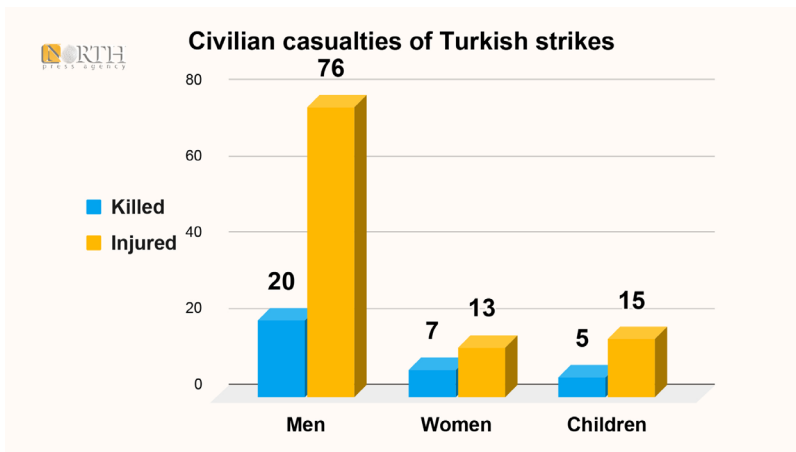
Fourth: Highlighting the legal framework of these violations according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

First: General statistics on the expansion of Turkish attacks

From the beginning of 2023 to late November, the Department recorded 136 civilian casualties - 32 killed and 104 injured - as a result of the Turkish shelling in Northeast Syria.

37 percent of the total 368 casualties was civilians, which is a high number indicating that Turkey shows disregard to human life by intentionally and indiscriminately targeting a wide portion of the civilian population in the region.

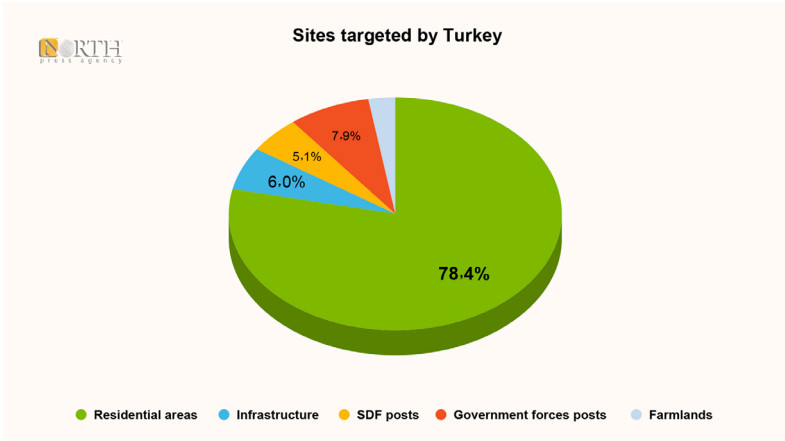
Turkish airstrikes killed seven women and five children between the ages of two and 12, in addition to injuring 13 women and 15 children aged between three and 17.



Civilian casualties of Turkish strikes in 2023

The figures show Turkish strikes targeted 806 sites, of which 78 percent were residential areas, including 41 sites of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Internal Security Forces of North and East Syria (Asayish), and 64 sites of the Syrian government forces.

The Department verified, through field sources and on-site visits and documentation, that 632 sites were civilian’s residences, 48 sites were vital facilities and infrastructure, and 21 were farmlands.



Sites targeted by Turkey in 2023

The data shows that the highest number of the targeted sites was in the northern countryside of Aleppo, Ain Issa in the north of Raqqa, and Tel Tamr in the northwest of Hasakah. These areas are repeatedly shelled by military bases inside Turkish territories or in areas controlled by the Turkish forces and their affiliated armed opposition factions, aka the Syrian National Army (SNA), within Syrian territories.

The strikes targeted 329 sites in the northern countryside of Aleppo in areas held by the AANES and the government forces, 161 sites in the countryside of Ain Issa and Tel Abyad in the north of Raqqa, and 88 sites in the town of Tel Tamr and its countryside.

The Department recorded that the Turkish forces attacked 53 sites in Qamishli, 49 in Hasakah, 47 in Manbij, 46 in Kobani, 18 in Derik (al-Malikiyah), and 15 in Raqqa.

The statistic of affected locations in Hasakah include Turkish drone strikes against two sites in the vicinity of the Washokani camp, which houses IDPs of the city of Sere Kaniye (Ras al-Ain) in northeastern Syria, causing fear and panic among the IDPs.

Humanitarian efforts were negatively impacted in towns and camps sheltering previously displaced individuals from areas attacked and controlled by Turkey in Afrin, Tel Abyad, and Sere Kaniye. Moreover, aid trucks faced more obstacles at crossings, whereas the availability of electricity, fuel for cooking and heating declined.

Additionally, schools were closed in areas near the Syrian-Turkish border from Oct. 5 to Oct. 20, for fear of Turkish attacks. A school in the village of Dada Abdal in the countryside of Zirgan (Abu Rasin) in the northwest of Hasakah was partially damaged as well.

On Nov. 23, a Turkish drone strike killed an employee of a humanitarian organization in the countryside of Amuda in the west of Qamishli.

Second: Turkey aims to destroy infrastructure

Turkish forces intensified and expanded the area of attacks on Northeast Syria during October 2023, under the pretext that assailants who carried out the bombing in Ankara on Oct. 1, had received training in Syria.

Following the attack, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hakan Fidan, stated that Turkish military, security, and intelligence forces would target both the infrastructure and superstructure, as well as energy facilities in the region.

Turkey targeted 37 infrastructure sites, 253 residential sites, and 41 military sites. The statistics recorded by

the Monitoring and Documentation Department of North Press revealed that 88 percent of the targeted sites were civilian objects and had no military presence there.

During the attacks, Turkey appeared determined on weakening areas in northern Syria and destroying services that the AANES provided for the population without any consideration for the lives of civilians who were killed or injured, or for the livelihoods of millions of Syrians, both original inhabitants and IDPs.

The continuous and verified documentations reveal that Turkey succeeded in destroying significant portions of essential sectors, most notably the production of petroleum derivatives, household gas, and power stations. This destruction directly impacted people's quality of life and violated their rights to access safe water.

The strikes and damages left behind a collapsed and irredeemable infrastructure. The Turkish authorities are responsible for the consequences of their operations. The international community should not allow Turkey to openly threaten and execute strikes that jeopardize essential services for millions of people in northern and northeastern Syria.

The officially declared numbers, photos, and data indicate that the damages incurred by the energy sector during the October escalation are very high, especially considering the region already suffers from limited resources.

The total losses of the energy sector, including oil and power stations, exceeded \$1.27 billion. The impact was not limited to material losses only, as it led to the shutdown of water stations that rely on electricity produced by power stations.

Third: Turkish strikes target civilians' houses and workplaces

The following testimonies reveal that the majority of civilian victims who were killed or injured as a result of Turkish strikes were in their houses, workplaces, and on main roads.

Four incidents, which occurred in October and November, are clear examples of unjustifiable Turkish attacks against civilians.

The Monitoring and Documentation Department obtained testimonies from sources, residents, and community leaders. The Department also conducted a thorough geographic survey, verifying the coordinates of the locations, which confirm the absence of any military facilities in these areas.

The victims who were interviewed sustained severe physical injuries and lost some of their organs or underwent surgeries but could not fully recover, as they still have shrapnel in their bodies. Others lost their houses, breadwinners, or their ability to work, not to mention physical pain and psychological trauma.

Victims at work

On Oct.9, a Turkish strike targeted a group of female laborers while harvesting cotton in a farmland near the village of Bushayriya in the north of Hasakah.

Farah Adnan al-Kheir, 13, lost both of her legs, and four other workers sustained less severe injuries to their heads, intestines, and limbs.

These girls and women, who are relatives, already suffered from years-long living difficulties and lack of job opportunities suitable for women and girls where they live in al-Nashwa neighborhood in Hasakah.

Hamda al-Obeid, Farah's mother, said she was left shocked and incapable of helping her daughter as the scene was filled with dust. She could hear, however, her daughters voice saying, "I cannot walk."

The local hospital in the town of Derbasiyah transferred the injured to hospitals in Hasakah, where they received treatment and were discharged. Meanwhile, Farah continued to receive physical therapy provided by the Kurdish Red Crescent (KRC) organization until she was able to sit in a wheelchair.

The job opportunities of these young girls and women were badly affected due to the shelling as they can no longer perform physical work, according to one of the survivor of the incident, Jiyana Eidan Tamr, 16.

All of them lost the ability to work in agriculture that they relied on as a source of income due to their need for physical or psychological treatment to overcome the effects of trauma.

The possibility of targeting workers, in a region known for agriculture like Hasakah, puts the majority of the population at risk and makes it difficult for them to earn a living for themselves and their families.

Statistics of the Monitoring and Documentation Department show that 30 individuals among the civilian victims of Turkish strikes, were killed or injured while they were in their workplaces or on their way to work.

Targeting infrastructure endangers civilians' lives

On Oct.5, Turkish drones targeted the oil stations in the village of Gerdahol in the east of Qamishli, as part of their military escalation against the infrastructure in AANES-held areas.

Shrapnel that scattered in the surrounding area, which includes residential houses, as a result of these attacks resulted in the immediate killing of Muhammad Hussein al-Alaiwi, a 50-year-old civilian, and the injury of his son, Mu'tasem, 13, with varying wounds to the head, eye, and chest.

Mu'tasem said that shrapnel from a first strike hit parts of their house and damaged their wall. As they tried to leave, they were hit by shrapnel from a second strike.

The boy underwent a series of surgeries in Damascus to treat a serious injury to the left eye. He still carries fragments of shrapnel in his chest that are difficult to remove.

Muhammad Hussein Al-Alaiwi was a father of seven and worked in traditional medicine as a herbalist. He lived, along with his brothers and mother, in houses built on their farmland and had no military affiliation.

Ali Alaiwi, the victim's brother, said in an interview nearly a month after the incident that his brother's family lost their breadwinner and that his children and mother have not accepted his death, as they still wait for him to come from work.

The area, which extends from the eastern countryside of Qamishli to the Iraqi border, includes several oil wells

and stations, most of which are close to villages and residential areas.

Indiscriminate shelling on contact-line areas

On Oct.7, Amsha Khalil al-Bakari, 65, was killed and her husband, Muhammad al-Khalaf al-Ali, 70, was injured while sitting in front of their house in the village of al-Khalidiya in the western countryside of Ain Issa, as a result of a shell launched from Turkish-controlled areas in the northern countryside of Raqqa.

Al-Ali said his wife was killed immediately, while he sustained injuries to his hand, as well as suffering from hearing problems due to the loud sound of the explosion, which was evident while interviewing him.

The shelling also forced the family to leave their damaged house and seek shelter in another house in the village.

This was the third time that their house was targeted by Turkish shelling.

Since Turkish forces and the SNA factions occupied Sere Kaniye and Tel Abyad in 2019, villages surrounding these areas have been repeatedly subjected to indiscriminate shelling with artillery, mortars, and light weapons.

Since the beginning of 2023, 166 sites have been targeted in the northern countryside of Raqqa, particularly Ain Issa. These areas witnessed the highest number of indiscriminate shelling.

According to a survey conducted by the Department, 36 villages in the countryside of Ain Issa alone are located

on contact lines with areas under the control of Turkish forces and SNA factions.

Turkish drones target vehicles of civilians

Turkey constantly claims that its drones target military personnel and military sites. These drones, however, either directly targeted civilians or injured them when attacking military personnel at different times and places.

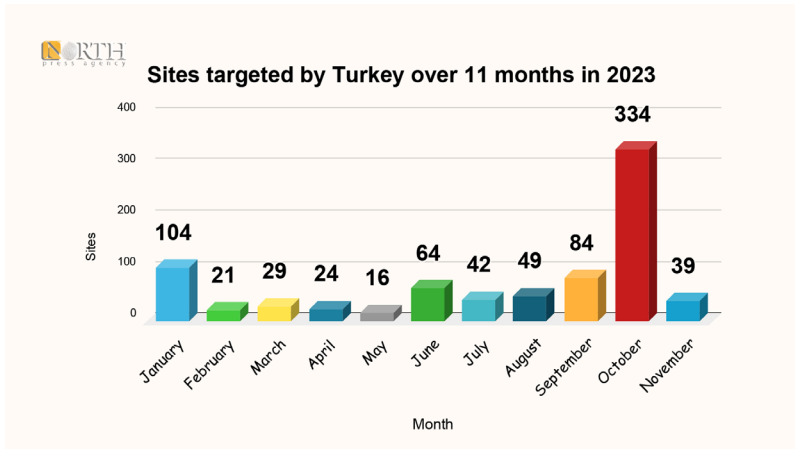
On Nov.23, a Turkish drone attacked a civilian's car on the road between Amuda and Qamishli, killing Jwan Suleiman Muhammad, 34, and injuring his sister Ronak and her husband Munir Abdulfares.

Hussein Muhammad, Jwan's uncle, said his nephew succumbed to his injuries sustained during a Turkish drone strike while returning from his sister's house in the countryside of Amuda.

He said that Jwan worked in a humanitarian organization and was the breadwinner of his family after his parents passed away. He emphasized that his nephew had no political or military affiliation.

Statistics recorded by the Department show that Turkish drone strikes, which are considered to be precise, hit 128 locations, 84 of which were not military sites.

During 2023 from January to November, Turkish drone strikes against Northeast Syria led to at least 66 civilian casualties, where 22 were killed and 44 others were injured.



Sites targeted by Turkey over 11 months in 2023

Fourth: The legal framework

Turkish attacks resulted in loss of civilian lives and extensive damage to vital infrastructure, including oil fields, gas and power plants, and water facilities. Over three million civilians, including IDPs, have been severely impacted.

Turkish attacks denied the population of Northeast Syria from their fundamental rights to life, access to clean water, healthcare, electricity and other essential services.

Article 18 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as Article 52 of 1977 Additional Protocol I, which prohibit the targeting of civilian objects, state, “Civilian objects shall not be the object of attack or of reprisals. Civilian objects are all objects which are not military objectives.”

Turkey did not take into account protection of civilians when carrying out indiscriminate bombing, violating the laws of war in accordance with international law

and Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions - Articles 51-5 (a), 147, 56, 55, 53, 52 and 50 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which was adopted on July 17, 1998, and entered into force on July 1, 2002, confirms that these attacks are war crimes in international or non-international armed conflicts according to Articles 8 (2)(b)(v).

The population in Northeast Syria, including minorities, were subjected to Turkish bombardment and suffered its consequences. Turkey deliberately targeted civilians and destroyed the infrastructure of dozens of cities under the pretext of fighting terrorism. Turkey's motives are based on racial and ethnic discrimination against Kurds in the region. These actions are classified as a direct violation of their rights as a minority, and a clear and explicit violation of their legitimate rights in accordance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as civil and political rights, not to mention their right to self-determination. These actions are contrary to the provisions of the 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ratified by the Turkish State.

Rule 1 of Customary International Humanitarian Law, applied in international and non-international conflicts and unanimously codified in Sweden's IHL Manual, stipulates parties to the conflict to distinguish between military and civilian objectives, and between combatants and civilians. Here, we point out that Jwan Suleiman Muhammad was an unarmed civilian who worked for a humanitarian organization, nevertheless was targeted and killed.

Civilians generally avoid military units and centers due to various reasons, such as prohibition of entry to strangers, the risks associated with armed training and explosives, and the continuous dangers of conflict and attacks since the protests broke out in Syria in 2011.

However, civilians cannot avoid Turkish targets, which the documentations show include the entire area controlled by the SDF and administered by the AANES. There is no proportionality between forces of both sides. In addition, no war has been declared for emergency laws to be applied or to sound sirens to warn civilians.

In documented cases in this report, victims' families did not leave their houses located near oil stations, infrastructure facilities, areas close to the Syrian-Turkish border, and contact-lines between areas held by Turkish forces and the SDF.

Moreover, civilians will continue to perform daily activities, such as using cars, traveling on main roads, and shopping despite deteriorating living and economic conditions in the country. Therefore, it is imperative that Turkey adheres to customary and treaty rules of the international law, and refrain from indiscriminately targeting populated areas for racist reasons or to expand influence over other areas in Syria.

The victims and cases presented in this report are part of a larger number of victims. This number will increase even more if the Turkish government is not deterred or subjected to investigation, prosecution, and accountability to redress the victims and their families.

The Turkish attacks violated the right to life of individuals like Jwan Suleiman Muhammad, Muhammad Hussein

al-Alaiwi, and Amsha Khalil al-Bakari. These attacks violated the right to physical health of Farah Adnan al-Kheir, Mu'tasem Muhammad al-alaiwi, and Muhammad al-Khalaf al-Ali. These acts of murder and violence to life and person are prohibited under Article 3 (1) (a) of the Third Geneva Convention.

The consequences of these attacks may constitute crimes that violate other human rights, such as the right to work (Article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), the right to housing (Article 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the right to safety and privacy.

The female workers in the cotton fields have lost their jobs and psychological stability. The family of Amsha Khalil al-Bakari has lost its house and the security they used to live in. These are just a few recent cases presented in the report, whereas there are hundreds of other cases on the ground.

The victims in northeastern Syria lack effective legal support to guide and empower them to file lawsuits and prosecute perpetrators of the violations against them in international courts to seek reparation.

The right to education of Mu'tasem Muhammad al-Alaiwi and Farah Adnan al-Kheir has also been violated. Both of them will face challenges in attending school.

The airstrikes caused a disruption in the educational process and panic among the local population, not to mention forcing dozens of families to be displaced or to relocate.

Rule 160 of the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) study of customary international humanitarian law states that Statutes of limitation may not apply to crimes against humanity, however long they may be. Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity, adopted on Nov. 26, 1968, stipulate that all persons involved in inhuman crimes must be prosecuted at any time for as long as they have been documented.

These violations caused by the Turkish attacks are evident and have been documented in individual files and collective records.

Article 54 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I, Article 14 of Additional Protocol II and rule 54 of the ICRC's study of international humanitarian law stipulate the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, the prohibition of starvation, deprivation of livelihoods, energy, agriculture, water and electricity plants.

The silence of the international community over Turkey's violations of human rights and all international conventions in Northeast Syria pushed civilians to immigrate as they lost their sense of security, which is one of their fundamental rights.

Recommendations:

1. To conduct independent international investigations into each aggression carried out by the Turkish State that resulted in civilian deaths and damages to civilian objects and vital facilities so they can be subsequently referred to the International Court of Justice or International Criminal Court.
2. Facilitation of access to legal redress and reparations for victims and their families and hold the perpetrators accountable for the violations committed against them.
3. The establishment of an international mechanism to monitor and investigate the security situation in Northeast Syria on the ground, particularly in terms of recording breaches committed via drones. This could take the form of the deployment of an international force to maintain peace and security, as was the mission of UNIFIL in Lebanon.
4. To call for the establishment of a UN-sponsored no-fly safe zone in Northeast Syria.

Monitoring and Documentation
Department - North Press

