

Report on the Situation of the Yazidi Population Following the Recent Military Attacks on the Neighborhoods of Sheikh Maksood and Ashrafieh

Aleppo – Syria

1. Introduction and Methodology

This report has been prepared by the author based on numerous semi-structured interviews and confidential discussions with Yazidi individuals from the city of Aleppo who have been directly or indirectly affected by the recent military attacks on the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maksood and Ashrafieh.

Data collection was conducted in close cooperation with Yazidi organizations and civil society actors in Syria, who provided support in establishing contact with affected individuals, organizing the interviews, and contextualizing local conditions.

All interviews were conducted under strict guarantees of anonymity, in accordance with the *Do No Harm* principle, and in compliance with internationally recognized ethical standards of humanitarian and human rights documentation. The purpose of this report is to inform ministries, foreign ministries, and international organizations—particularly United Nations bodies and specialized agencies such as WHO, OHCHR, and OCHA—about the dramatic human rights, humanitarian, and psychosocial situation of the Yazidi population.

2. Demographic Situation Prior to the Military Escalation

According to consistent information from local sources and credible civil society actors, approximately 1,200 Yazidi families were residing in the Sheikh Maksood neighborhood of Aleppo prior to the recent military escalation.

Over many years, the Yazidi population had been an integral part of the local social fabric. Livelihoods were predominantly based on informal employment, daily wage labor, and basic artisanal activities, supplemented by limited and irregular humanitarian assistance.

3. Current Situation Following the Military Attacks

As a result of the recent military operations, the Yazidi population has been almost entirely displaced from the Sheikh Maksood neighborhood.

According to verified information, only ten documented Yazidi families currently remain in the area. The overwhelming majority were forcibly displaced due to sustained shelling, severe security risks, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and well-founded fears of persecution, arbitrary arrest, and repression.

Under international humanitarian law standards, these events meet the criteria of forced internal displacement.

4. Displacement Patterns and Current Locations

The displaced Yazidi families are currently distributed as follows:

- Approximately 500 families fled to villages and rural areas in the Afrin countryside.
- Around 35 families reached Northern and Eastern Syria after repeated displacement and the absence of any secure prospects for remaining elsewhere.
- A significant number relocated to other neighborhoods of Aleppo, including Suleimaniyah, Al-Midan, Al-Jamiliyah, Salah ad-Din, as well as other dispersed districts.

Housing conditions are precarious in nearly all cases. High rental costs, overcrowding, unstable shelter arrangements, and frequent relocations significantly exacerbate the social, economic, and psychological vulnerability of those affected.

5. Security Situation and Protection Gaps in the Afrin Area

Interviews consistently indicate that Yazidi families in the rural areas surrounding Afrin live under conditions of persistent insecurity and fear. Many deliberately avoid any form of public visibility, registration, or contact with authorities or humanitarian organizations.

This behavior is driven by credible fears of collective accusations, particularly regarding alleged or presumed affiliations with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) or the Autonomous Administration, often in the absence of due process, individual evidence, or transparent charges.

This situation results in:

- severe gaps in the documentation of humanitarian needs,
- de facto exclusion from humanitarian assistance,
- continuous psychological pressure, and
- particularly severe consequences for women, children, and older persons.

6. Forced Financial Exactions and Religious Discrimination

Multiple independent sources report that Yazidi families in certain villages of the Afrin countryside—particularly in Basofan—have been subjected to a payment of approximately USD 2,000 per family.

This payment is imposed as a condition for residing or remaining in the area and is legitimized by local armed actors as a compulsory levy, which they themselves refer to as *jizya* (“poll tax on non-Muslims”) and which is used to finance the acquisition of weapons.

This practice constitutes:

- an illegal forced exaction,
- collective discrimination and punishment of a religious minority, and

- a serious violation of international humanitarian law, particularly the prohibition on compelling civilians to finance military activities.

7. Health Situation, Injuries, and Psychosocial Burden

Among the displaced are numerous injured individuals, persons with chronic illnesses, and persons with disabilities whose health conditions have significantly deteriorated as a result of displacement.

Common challenges include:

- lack of access to emergency and follow-up medical care,
- interruption of ongoing treatments,
- fear of checkpoints or arrest when seeking medical services.
- In addition, nearly all interviewed individuals exhibit clear signs of severe psychosocial distress, including:
 - symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder,
 - anxiety and panic disorders,
 - depressive symptoms,
 - sleep disturbances and psychosomatic complaints.

Children, women, and older persons are particularly affected, many of whom have previously endured experiences of violence, displacement, and genocide. The situation urgently requires trauma-informed psychosocial support in accordance with WHO standards.

8. Arrests and Enforced Disappearances

There are credible indications of arbitrary arrests and detentions of Yazidi individuals from the Sheikh Maksood neighborhood.

The whereabouts and legal status of those affected remain largely unknown. Families refrain from making inquiries or pursuing legal action due to fear of reprisals—a circumstance that strongly suggests elements of enforced disappearance.

9. Grave Violations of International Humanitarian Law

Numerous testimonies and documented field information indicate that armed actors involved in the attacks on the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maksood and Ashrafieh openly displayed symbols and insignia of the terrorist organization “Islamic State” (IS).

Furthermore, there are indications that non-Syrian individuals with documented prior IS affiliation are currently integrated into official military structures.

Several of the groups involved are listed on international sanctions regimes, including those of the United Kingdom, due to serious human rights violations.

These facts constitute clear violations of:

- relevant UN Security Council resolutions on counterterrorism,
- the prohibition of reintegration of terrorist actors, and
- the special protection afforded to religious minorities,
- and represent an immediate threat to the Yazidi community.

10. Conclusion

The findings of this report demonstrate a systematic pattern of displacement, lack of protection, religious discrimination, economic coercion, inadequate access to healthcare, and severe psychosocial traumatization of the Yazidi population of Aleppo.

The situation constitutes an acute humanitarian, health, and human rights crisis that requires immediate international action.

11. Recommendations

1. Establish confidential humanitarian protection mechanisms for Yazidi internally displaced persons.
2. Provide immediate medical and psychosocial emergency assistance, including trauma-informed care in line with WHO standards.
3. Conduct independent international investigations into forced payments, arrests, and human rights violations.
4. Ensure non-discriminatory access to humanitarian assistance.
5. Document arrests through neutral international mechanisms.
6. Prepare for safe, voluntary, and dignified return, secured by international guarantees.
7. Examine sanctioning and accountability mechanisms against responsible actors.
8. Clearly reject any international normalization of armed structures with terrorist affiliations.

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Date: 15 January 2026