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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 August 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.17-15085(E)



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Turkey must be kept from attacking Afrin

According to reports from friends of the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) who live in Afrin, in the north-west of the Syrian Arabic Republic, the Turkish army is carrying out rocket and artillery attacks on their villages. Furthermore, the people in the region, which is mostly inhabited by Kurds, are living in fear of a large-scale offensive by the Turkish army, supported by radical Islamists from the Syrian Arabic Republic. The region – which has been almost completely cut off from the outside world for many years – has become a home to many civil war refugees.

For some weeks now, Turkey has been setting up heavy war equipment along the border to Afrin, and there have been attacks with heavy artillery and rockets almost every day. The United Kingdom-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has confirmed our information about the situation in Afrin. The Turkish military and the radical Islamists are carrying out attacks on the Yazidi villages of Kastal Jendo, Basufan, and Katma almost every day. In 2013, these villages had already been attacked by the “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria” (ISIS). A total number of 30 civilians from Afrin lost their lives in attacks by Turkish military in the period from 2011 to 2017, and at least 35 people were injured. About 15,000 olive trees were destroyed, and grain fields were set on fire in the summer months.

A major offensive on Afrin will destabilize the entire region and lead to the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Kurds and tens of thousands of Arabs who have been living in the region for years. In early July, Kurds from Afrin had contacted our human rights organization, asking us to send an appeal to the European politicians to do everything possible to put an end to Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s unjustified war against the civilian population of Afrin.

There are almost one million people living in the region, half of whom are refugees – mainly from Aleppo, which is 55 kilometers away. The city of Afrin, which had up to 80,000 inhabitants before the civil war, is located on the eponymous river, 25 kilometers to the south of the Syrian-Turkish border. The Afrin region consists of 366 villages and seven smaller towns. Most of the Kurds in the Afrin region are Sunni Muslims, but there are also tens of thousands of Kurdish Yazidis and Alawis.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council:

- To condemn the Turkish attacks against Afrin,
- To urge the United Nations institutions to make sure that the civilian population of Afrin has enough supplies of medicine and food,
- To urge the member states of the Human Rights Council to ensure that the region of Afrin will be accepted an autonomous region within the Syrian Arabic Republic.