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OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Escalation of hostilities in northern Syria

An escalation in hostilities in northern Syria this month has resulted in the deaths and injuries of civilians. This worrying development was also marked by the targeted killing in eastern rural Aleppo of a social media activist and his pregnant wife. We are very concerned for the wider population affected by the fighting, as well as further mass displacement of civilians.

We fear this latest rise in hostilities involving a number of parties, particularly Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and some of the Turkish-affiliated armed groups, could spread and impact other areas in northern Syria, including Aleppo and Idlib.

On 7 October, a social media activist and his pregnant wife were shot and killed in the al-Sinaa area of al-Bab city. He had been organizing, and reporting on, sit-ins and demonstrations against the actions of Turkish-affiliated armed groups in the area, which included the seizure of properties.

Subsequently, over a seven-day period from October 12 to 18, our Office verified the killing of at least seven civilians, including four women and three children, in northern Syria. At least 11 others were injured—two women, seven men, and two children. The total number of civilians killed and injured may be higher.

The casualties occurred in areas in and around the cities of al-Bab, Afrin, and Kafr Janna, as well as other areas in northern Aleppo. The victims were hit by ground-based strikes or small arms and light weapons fire in residential areas as a result of the fighting between the various warring parties.

It is essential that parties to the conflict take constant care to spare the civilian population and civilian objects in the conduct of hostilities and adopt all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event to minimize, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and damage to civilian objects.

Reports of ground-based strikes affecting residential areas are also particularly alarming, raising concerns as to the breach of the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks.

We also call on all parties that exercise government-like functions and effective control of the areas at stake to ensure that the right to life of individuals is respected and protected, while guaranteeing people’s rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.

We urge all States, particularly those that control armed groups or have influence over parties to the conflict, to use their power to ensure a de-escalation of military operations and the protection of civilians in northern Syria.

All efforts should be made to achieve a sustainable political solution, centred on ensuring the full protection of all civilians.

ecoi.net summary:

Northern Syria: Several civilians killed in recent escalation of armed conflict between various armed formations, including Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Turkish-affiliated armed groups

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Syrian Arab Republic

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Austrian Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)	Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583 F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net	Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice
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