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EJDM Europäische Vereinigung von Juristinnen & Juristen für Demokratie und Menschenrechte in der Welt

EJDH Asociación Europea de los Juristas por la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos en el Mundo

EJDH Association Européenne des Juristes pour la Démocratie & les Droits de l'Homme

EGDU Associazione Europea delle Giuriste e dei Giuristi per la Democrazia e i diritti dell'Uomo nel Mondo

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ELDH calls on EU and the EU member states to condemn the Turkish attack on Afrin (Northern Syria)

ELDH calls on the EU, and all other world powers, to condemn Turkey's unprovoked attack on the people of Afrin in Syria. This amounts to a war crime (aggression) and commission of crimes against humanity.

Afrin, whose population is predominantly Kurdish, but also comprises Arabs, Yezidis, Armenian and Assyrian Christians, among many others, has until now been one of the most stable and secure regions in Syria. With very little international aid, Afrin has taken in so many Syrian internally displaced persons in the last five years that its population has doubled to 400,000. While its defenders, the YPG or People's Protection Units, are part of the Syrian Democratic Forces, which have up to now been allied with the US military in its war with Daesh, Afrin itself is surrounded by enemies: Turkish-supported jihadi groups, al Qaeda, and Turkey.

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan first threatened, and is now making good on his threats, to attack the region, simply on ideological grounds, without even the pretext of the YPG having attacked or threatened Turkey in any way. This is an act of unilateral violence, and as such, a violation of the Nuremberg principles (that waging a war of aggression is the "supreme war crime"), Art. 2.4 of the UN Charter, and the crime of aggression under the Statute of the International Criminal Court. If recent statements by Mr Erdogan are to be believed, the ultimate intention of the Turkish invasion is to carry out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the region's Kurdish population. It is unusual that a military incursion is

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begun with an open declaration of an intention to commit war crimes; but in this instance that appears to be the case.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was right when he condemned Turkey's military operation in Afrin as brutal aggression, stating that the offensive is a violation of Syria's sovereignty and part of Ankara's support for Takfiri terrorist groups operating inside the conflict-plagued Arab country.

Up to now the reactions of the EU, the US and Russia and the Governments of the EU member states to these crimes range between tolerance and complicity, talking of the right of Turkey to keep its borders secure or to protect its own citizens from terrorist elements. Under the influence of these governments even the UN Security Council failed to condemn the Turkish aggression.

Until now, the region has been the place of a world-historical democratic experiment. Local councils, women's councils, and assemblies have been created, along with women's police and military units; the YPG also has a long track record of setting up local democratic governing councils in each of the towns it has liberated from ISIS. It has made repeated statements that it has no interest in Turkey and wishes to function only as a defence force for Syrian Kurds and other ethnicities living in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS), also known as "Rojava," which includes Afrin. Rather, it is this very democratic ideology that the Turkish government objects to, claiming it is inspired by the "terrorist" PKK. In other words, rather than welcoming a feminist, ecological, democratic experiment, international powers are siding with a power which is unleashing an unprovoked military assault on the region for just that reason.

Turkey is now conducting an overwhelming air assault and ground invasion of Afrin, which has already resulted in significant civilian casualties. Some of these were, ironically, internally displaced persons who had fled other regions of Syria for Afrin's relative stability and safety.

This attack is a blatant act of aggression against a peaceful and democratically-governed region and population. The Kurdish people have endured the loss of thousands of young men and women who joined the YPG, and YPJ women's force, to rid the world of ISIS. The international community (U.S., Russia, E.U. members, etc) have a moral obligation to stand behind the Kurdish people, Yezidi people, and others threatened with ethnic cleansing. We call on the EU and the governments of the EU member states to demand Turkey pull back it's invading forces immediately and to cease threats against its neighbours.