

# Northern and Northeast Syria in Transition

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## Introduction

The January 30, 2026 agreement between the Syrian Government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) formally ended active hostilities in Northeast Syria. It does not mark the end of the humanitarian crisis. The transition period is characterised by acute unmet needs, intensifying protection risks, and a structural accountability deficit that, if left unaddressed, will foreclose safe return and undermine the political process. This paper urges the Dutch parliament to keep humanitarian and human rights concerns at the centre of its engagement with Syria's transition.

## Humanitarian Needs: Acute, Underfunded, and at Risk of Being Overlooked

More than 190,000 people have been displaced since early January, with 128,400 still displaced as of February 10 (OCHA, February 2026). Women and children constitute 91% of the displaced population. Over 160,000 fled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods in Aleppo alone; at least 292 families were forcibly relocated to Northeast Syria without protection guarantees. Displaced persons are sheltering in 259 schools and public buildings unfit for habitation, amid acute shortages of water, health services, and food: only one in five Syrian families consistently meets its nutritional needs.

Pre-existing vulnerabilities compound the crisis. Health facilities were operating at 54% functionality before the escalation; water infrastructure is now at 40% capacity, affecting over one million people in Al-Hasakeh. At least 28 explosive ordnance casualties were recorded in January–February, with large areas requiring clearance before returns or reconstruction can begin.

The humanitarian response is severely underfunded. Organisations received only one-third of the \$3.2 billion required for Syria in 2025, a 42% drop from 2024. The 2026 Humanitarian Response Plan targets only 50% of the 16.5 million people in need. The health sector faces an immediate \$15 million gap; winterisation is only 25% funded.

# Human Rights Violations: A Transition That Must Be Monitored

## What Has Been Documented

What OCHA and ACAPS initially reported as "credible reports" of violations has since been extensively corroborated by field documentation from Synergy/Hevdestî, DAANES, and Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), covering 20 direct interviews and 240 verified video recordings.

Verified documentation records at least 45 civilians killed and 120+ wounded in Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyeh in Aleppo, including women and children. The sole hospital in Sheikh Maqoud was repeatedly struck and rendered inoperable with patients inside. Government forces issued so-called "warning maps" prior to strikes, but widespread communications blackouts rendered these inaccessible to most residents; they do not meet the threshold of an effective warning under Article 57 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions.

At least 541 enforced disappearances are under verification from Aleppo alone, including 26 women. Arrests were conducted without warrants; families received no notification; detainees were held in undisclosed locations. On 18 January, a Kurdish family fleeing Raqqa toward Al-Hasakah was stopped at a checkpoint, questioned about their ethnicity, and six members, including two children, were executed. Verified video evidence documents collective public humiliation of civilians using dehumanising language explicitly tied to Kurdish identity, and the desecration of bodies, including a female fighter thrown from a rooftop. In several instances, Syrian Army personnel intervened not to stop violations but to prevent filming — a deliberate suppression of documentation. Foreign fighters wearing ISIS insignia participated in operations; ISIS detainees were released from multiple prisons including Al Shaddadi.

These violations are not confined to Kurdish areas. STJ documents 67 motorcycle drive-by killings of Alawite civilians in Homs and Hama in October 2025 alone, with no investigations concluded. The same accountability deficit runs across the transition.

## Protection Risks Going Forward

Non-Arab and non-Muslim communities, including Kurdish, Yezidi, and Christian communities, face specific risks under new governing authorities whose social conservatism contrasts sharply with SDF-era norms. Some displaced persons face pressure to leave shelters while homes remain occupied or damaged, with HLP disputes unresolved. The absence of ethnic disaggregation in official IDP data obscures protection needs and risks compounding minority marginalisation.

## Recommendations

1. Advocate for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from northern Syria as a condition for a stable and rights-compliant transition, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

2. Establish inclusive transitional justice mechanisms covering all of Syria, with specific provisions for Kurdish and other minority areas.
3. Support the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP) and press Syrian authorities for immediate disclosure of the fate of the disappeared documented from Aleppo and northern Syria.
4. Increase and sustain humanitarian funding for Northern Syria, prioritising health, WASH, nutrition, and explosive ordnance clearance.
5. Advocate for full humanitarian access, including designated corridors and protection of humanitarian personnel and infrastructure.
6. Insist on independent human rights monitoring in Northeast Syria, including in areas transitioning to government control.
7. Support renewal of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria mandate and press for its access to the northeast.
8. Condition diplomatic and financial support on verifiable minority rights commitments.
9. Exclude human rights violators from command positions through independent vetting.
10. Oppose premature returns and ensure displaced persons, particularly minorities at documented risk, are protected from direct or indirect coercion to return.

## Conclusion

The Netherlands, as a longstanding humanitarian donor and principled voice in international affairs, is well-placed to advocate for a transition that is safe, rights-compliant, and adequately resourced. Field documentation makes clear that what has occurred is not a series of isolated incidents but a pattern, of ethnic targeting, systematic disappearances, and structural impunity that runs from street-level perpetrators to a transitional government that has not yet demonstrated the will to investigate its own forces. Continued impunity forecloses safe return, entrenches fear, and delegitimises the transition.

## Sources

- OCHA Situation Reports 1 & 3 (Jan–Feb 2026)
- UNHCR NE Syria Flash Update (31 Jan 2026)
- UNHCR Regional Flash Update #66 (27 Feb 2026)
- ACAPS Briefing Note (15 Jan 2026)
- OCHA Security Council Statement (22 Jan 2026)
- IOM DTM Round 7 (25 Jan 2026)
- DAANES Violations Documentation (13 Jan 2026)
- File of Violations Against Rojava (23 Jan 2026)
- Multi-area violations compilation (Jan 2026)
- STJ Drive-by Killings (Feb 2026)
- Synergy/Hevdestî Briefing, Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh
- Synergy/Hevdestî, "From Aleppo to Al-Hasakah" (Jan 2026)