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1.3.3. Kurds

With regards to the Kurdish community, upon taking control, Al-Sharaa held an initial meeting with a senior SDF delegation to establish the basis for future discussions. His remarks implied that the transitional administration did not align with the Turkish-backed SNA's anti-SDF approach. Nevertheless, Mohammed A. Salih, a scholar specialising in Kurdish and regional issues, described his remarks as unclear and unsupportive of Kurdish goals. Following the rapid capture of Aleppo by the HTS-led offensive in late November, SNA forces forced thousands of Kurdish civilians to flee west of the Euphrates River. In Aleppo, the Kurds primarily interacted with HTS, which has exhibited moderation and openness to dialogue. In contrast, the SNA consistently engaged in conflict with the SDF in Manbij.199 The continuous existence of the SDF was stated by organisers of the National Dialogue Conference as the reason for the exclusion of the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration and its related bodies from the conference.200

Housing and property violations continued throughout January as displaced Kurdish residents attempted to return to Afrin, a Kurdish-majority region in the Aleppo countryside, and its surrounding areas. SNA factions reportedly forced them to pay up to 10 000 USD to reclaim their homes. Concurrently SNA factions detained at least 10 Kurds in Afrin in January, with ransom demands for release rising above 1 000 USD per person.201 By mid-February, there had been minimal change for the Kurds in Afrin despite the deployment of Damascus' security forces in the city on February 7. Abuses by various factions in Afrin reportedly continued. Returning residents discovered that their homes were occupied by fighters or civilians, who demanded substantial sums of money for their departure, despite the previous residents having received formal assurances from the transitional administration to return.202 Towards the end of February Al-Sharaa visited Afrin and convened with local Kurdish representatives who conveyed their grievances; in response, he committed to substituting the factions in the city with official security forces and addressing the abuses directed at the Kurdish community.203

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