

Mr President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Ferhad Ahma, and I am speaking here on behalf of PÊL – Civil Waves Organization.

The challenges faced by Syrian minorities are not limited to the attempts to forcibly displace these groups from their areas of origin; but also include various policies and practices aimed at eradicating local ethnic cultures, as well as different religious and cultural groups.

To date, there has been no constitutional recognition of the ethnic and religious pluralism in Syria since the state was established. The Syrian state has failed in its duty to protect local cultures, and to provide millions of Syrians the educational opportunities to learn in their native languages, such as the Kurds.

After 2011, when many inhabitants in the northeast of Syria were granted the opportunity to learn their native languages for the first time in the history of the state, this was in areas that broke away from state control. In the areas occupied by Turkey since 2018, the Turkish state has conducted policies aimed at limiting the use of the Kurdish language, as well as other local languages. It has gradually and systematically removed these languages from the different levels of education.

In parallel with these policies, Turkey is actively undertaking a process of Turkification of the educational system in the areas it has invaded in northern Syria, in order to tie these areas to it and alter their cultural identity.

The practices of Turkey and those of the Syrian military factions connected to it are not limited to restricting the Kurdish language and culture, but have extended to the deliberate destruction of numerous historical sites in Afrin, particularly, as well as stealing the contents of the same.

Furthermore, the various Turkish authorities present in Afrin, Ras al-Ayn, and Tell Abyad in particular, have ignored the serious violations committed by military groups and have failed to exert any effort in preventing these militia from attacking local inhabitants from national and religious minorities, such as the Kurds and Yazidis. These armed groups affiliated with the Syrian National Army have seized thousands of houses and the possessions of original inhabitants. To date, they are also preventing those displaced from returning and reclaiming their possessions.

Within this framework, Turkey has failed to perform its obligations as an occupying force, as it has not protected the possessions of the original inhabitants. It has further failed to perform its duties in protecting the holy religious sites of the Yazidi people,

but instead left the field open to armed militia to extend the scope of their violations to include destroying minority cemeteries and cultural centres.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The acts perpetrated by Turkey and the military groups affiliated with it are aimed at eradicating cultural and linguistic pluralism in the north of Syria, as well as realising a demographic change along the entirety of the border between Syria and Turkey. These actions include numerous elements of genocide and threaten civil peace in the country.

The protection of national and cultural diversity, including the diversity under threat in northern Syria, demands a broad international adherence to strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity. Including, the protection of languages and cultures currently under threat.