

Dear Mr. President and attendees,

I am addressing your humanity and your wise judgement, in the name of an entire people that is dispersed in the geographies of a several countries. We are a people who, through the ages, have been suffering from the policy of their rulers despite our attempts to live peacefully alongside all minorities.

We believe that integration builds bridges between different cultures, and despite attempts from those in power to sow discord and conflict in order to destroy this bridge between us, we have succeeded in building a diverse society in our regions where every individual is proud to belong.

Ladies and gentlemen, due to the limited time available I shall refer to an example. The city of Afrin, which is comprised of all minorities and factions, including Kurds, Arabs and Turkman, and which was a fine example of peaceful coexistence, is today being exploited to become a theatre for carrying out operations and agendas of the ruling regimes, those being demographic change and instilling discord between coexisting peoples.

The Kurdish Syrian Afrin region is mostly populated by Kurdish people. At one point, prior to the start of the 2011 revolution, they represented 96% [of the population]. People primarily survived on the olive harvest. An unofficial census recently put the number of olive trees in their free region at 11 million trees. After the arrival of armed Kurdish factions from outside Syria, followed by armed opposition factions who entered the region and set up their headquarters, these factions resorted to a mentality of theft by cutting down olive trees with the intention of selling them as firewood in neighbouring regions. According to unofficial statistics, around 600,000 trees were cut down, most of which were considered productive.

Attempts to damage the economic base of the residents of Afrin region, by applying tariffs on olives and olive oil and detaining residents, hve forced many families to leave the Afrin region. Is reduced the Kurdish population to a critical level.

Ladies and gentlemen, what is happening in the Afrin region today previously happened in the governorate of Al Hasakah. In 1963 the government carried out a census in the governorate, the result of which was the revocation of the Syrian nationality from around 150 thousand families at that time, and these nationals were consequently classified as foreigners or unregistered so that their agricultural properties could be seized and their ownership transferred to Arab immigrants from Al Raqqa. This was all done with the goal of undermining peaceful coexistence in the region and sow the seeds of conflict which could erupt at any moment.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, we must warn that peaceful coexistence cannot exist in light of the attempts to change Syrian demographics in general, and Kurdish specifically, and the obliteration of identities in the region.

Thank you.

Ibrahim Korish, Head of the Afrin Civil Council.