

## **Terrorised Christians fleeing “soft ethnic cleansing” in north-east Syria**



Pro-Turkish forces are reportedly carrying out a “soft ethnic cleansing” of Christians in north-east Syria by terrorising them into fleeing, despite assurances from Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that his forces would not persecute religious minorities.

Bassam Ishak, the head of the Syriac National Council, said Syrian armed groups allied with Turkey are preventing Christians from accessing their land during the current cotton harvest.

“They [the Christians] were told, ‘We have orders not to physically touch the Christians, but know that you have no land here anymore’,” said Ishak, who is also a member of the Syrian Democratic Council.

He said the armed groups are “repeating what they did in Afrin”, referring to the

Turkish invasion of Afrin in north-west Syria in 2018, an invasion backed by Syrian rebels and Islamist extremists. “In Afrin, they took the harvest of the Kurds who lived there and now they are doing it to the Christians,” said Ishak.

“The Christians in Ras al-Ain own at least one-third of the agricultural land there. These forces are basically carrying out a ‘soft’ ethnic cleansing. The Christians are being frightened by these people, and then they lose their source of income. The Christians then ask why should they stay and live under the Islamists.”

Turkish-backed forces crossed into north-east Syria on 9 October causing more than 70,000 people to flee from Ras al-Ain and the nearby town of Tal Abaid. Within hours of the launch of the offensive, two Christians were killed in the border city of Qamishli and a Christian couple and their two children were injured when a shell hit their shop and home.

— Source: [barnabasfund.org](https://barnabasfund.org)