
REPORT:
**KURDISH LOBBY AUSTRALIA'S CASH DONATION TO 60 AFRIN REFUGEE FAMILIES
IN SULAIMANI, KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ**



BACKGROUND TO PROJECT

In September 2019, 240 Kurdish families from Afrin, Syria, lived in Sulaimani city. They fend for themselves with no help from international aid agencies, or the governments of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Back in their home district of Afrin in the province of Aleppo on the border with Turkey, most owned their own homes or farms, and worked as professionals or olive farmers, or owned and managed shops, or cloth and olive factories. But in January 2018 Turkey invaded the Kurdish-majority [district](#) of 800,000 people (half being internally displaced from other parts of Syria) and on March 18 took control of Afrin city. In the previous four days Kurdish security forces known as YPG and YPJ ordered people to evacuate: 200,000 people fled the city. All left in a hurry, taking only a few clothes, leaving behind up to 70,000 residents. Those who remain or attempt to return to Afrin are subject to Turkish soldiers and Turkey-armed Syrian Islamist militants committing [war crimes](#) and crimes against humanity. They also see a district being Islamised and [Turkified](#).

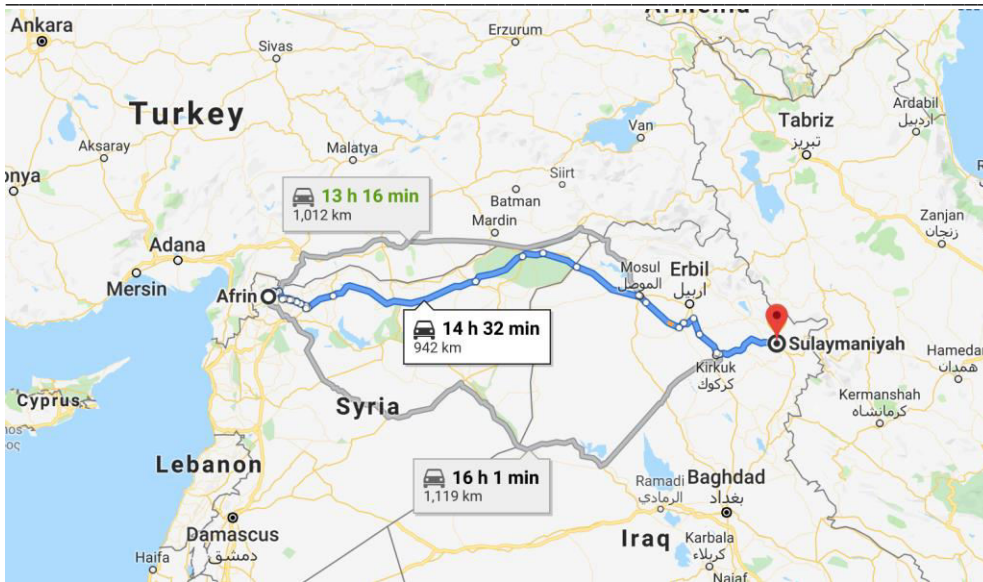
People left Afrin during or after the Turkish invasion. Some had family members killed in airstrikes, some took their families, and others left their families in the Kurdish-controlled neighbourhood of Aleppo city. Some fled to Kurd-secured Tel Rifaat just outside Afrin, and others travelled to the Kurdish-administered towns east of the Euphrates River. Those who made it to Sulaimani had to travel 1,000 kilometres by taxi and bus across northern Syria into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq determined to get as far away from Turkey's soldiers and proxy militias as possible.



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Map of journey Afrin refugees made to get to Sulaimani, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

In Sulaimani the refugees encountered a language barrier, given they spoke the Kurdish dialect of Kurmanji whereas Sorani is the dialect spoken in Sulaimani, and some reported resentment, as there are many Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region, this region having gone through its own hard times between 2014 and 2019. Others found the local people 'kind', but claimed help from any quarter was inadequate, that people living in camps received more help. In the city of Sulaimani they face high rents and prices. This leads to a number of families sharing one house. Most cannot find work and those that do work are employed as low paid, casual labour, whether in the city or on farms. It is worse for widows and divorcees without a breadwinner. They must rely on the generosity of relatives. Some cannot afford more than one meal a day, or to send their children to school. While government hospitals treat basic ailments for free, expenses for specialist medical attention, including dental care, are out of reach, as are operations, where a person must buy their own drugs and, if necessary, blood, before the operation, as well as pay for the doctors.

In early 2019, a member of Kurdish Lobby Australia visited Kurdistan, and identified Afrin refugees living in the city of Sulaimani as a group in need of help. KLA decided to raise money for them.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Kurdish Lobby Australia

Kurdish Lobby Australia is a non-partisan not-for-profit organisation established in 2015 to advocate for the people of Kurdistan and promote peace, democracy and prosperity in the four Kurdistan regions and Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Over time KLA has undertaken a number of small humanitarian projects as it is impossible to ignore the suffering of people living with war, political oppression and natural disasters.



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Kurdish Red Crescent



Kurdish Red Crescent, or *Heyva Sor a Kurd* in Kurdish, is a humanitarian not-for-profit organisation founded by medical staff in Qamishli, Rojava, northeast Syria in 2012 to help people living in war zones, disaster areas or in conditions of extreme poverty. Since 2016, it has been helping displaced people in Sulaimani. Its work is facilitated by co-ordinating with international organisations like WHO, MSF Doctors without Borders, UPP Un Ponte Per, IRC, Save the Children, ICOR, MRKI, etc.

FUND RAISING

KLA held a fund raising seminar on 30 June 2019 in Sydney. Reverend Bill Crews, Founder of the Exodus Foundation and honorary KLA member, spoke first, followed by presentations from KLA members about 'Effective ways to gain financial security', 'Act and grow rich in the share market' and 'How and where donations will be spent'. To raise funds an entry fee was charged, and a book 'Fire, Snow & Honey – Voices from Kurdistan' was sold, with all sales going towards the KLA's humanitarian effort. Other donations came in after the seminar. The total raised was AUD\$9,221 (USD\$6216).



DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS



After raising this money, Kurdish Red Crescent advised that 60 families should be allocated USD\$100 each, or the equivalent in food, and this distribution would help 250 people. KLA decided a one-off cash payment to each family would allow a family to decide what they needed most. Kurdish Red Crescent selected the families according to their assessment of need during regular visits to their houses. The priority was to help widowed and divorced women, of whom seven received a donation; families whose breadwinner had no job; and families who struggled to provide for many children.



Members of KLA and Kurdish Red Crescent oversaw the cash distribution on 1 September, 2019. The KLA member talked to some of the refugees. They described their former life in Afrin as 'living in paradise', that Afrin has so much green vegetation and olive trees. In Afrin, prices were low, one could live on USD\$100 for a month, whereas in Sulaimani this amount lasts two to seven days. In Afrin, they helped Syrians escaping ISIS or the civil war. Now they were refugees themselves.

All were very grateful for the one-off cash gift. Six out of seven who were asked preferred cash to food baskets or medicines, although most would spend the money on food. Some would use the money to pay for medical expenses. One said, 'It has been a long time and no-one has thought to support us'.



Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank the generous people who donated to this project. We also thank Kurdish Red Crescent for making it possible, and being so transparent and diligent in the process. For instance, Kurdish Red Crescent provided documentation of the distribution that included the names of the people who received the donation, their UNHCR Registration number, family size and current address.

