

U.N. documents serious human rights violations in southeast Turkey

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GENEVA (Reuters) – About 2,000 people were killed and entire neighborhoods razed in southeastern Turkey in 18 months of government security operations characterized by massive destruction and serious human rights violations, the United Nations said on Friday.

The U.N. human rights office said in a report on the period July 2015-December 2016 that up to 500,000 people, mostly Kurds, had been displaced, while satellite imagery showed the “enormous scale of destruction of the housing stock by heavy weaponry”.

The U.N. investigators documented numerous killings, disappearances and torture, as well as other human rights violations. The most serious abuses took place during periods of curfew imposed for several days at a time.

The investigators were not granted access by Turkey and as of last month the U.N. had not received any formal response to its concerns, the report said.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad al Hussein said in a statement on Friday that Turkey had “contested the veracity of the very serious allegations” in the report.

He was particularly concerned that Turkey appeared not to have launched any credible investigation into the hundreds of unlawful killings, adding that an independent investigation was both urgent and essential.

“It appears that not a single suspect was apprehended and not a single individual was prosecuted,” he said.

Almost 800 those killed were members of the security forces, and an unspecified number of the other 1,200 may have been involved in violent or non-violent action against the state, the report said.

In the town of Cizre in early 2016, up to 189 people were trapped for weeks in basements without water, food, medical attention and power before being killed by fire induced by shelling, the report said.

One woman's family was given "three small pieces of charred flesh", identified by DNA as being her remains. Her sister, who demanded legal action, was charged with terrorist offences, the report said.