

# Kurdistan: Scottish activist interviewed on Turkey's local elections

*From a polling station in the Şirnak mountains – an interview with Hazel, an election observer from Scotland for the 31 March local elections in Turkey.*

Sarah Glynn talks to one of two Scottish women who came to observe the elections at the invitation of the DEM Party [Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party – see note 1]. Hazel describes the militarisation of the region and the psychological pressure on voters. She witnessed the mass voting by soldiers brought in from outside the region, and saw the anger and worry in Şirnak (Şirnex) after their election was stolen by imported votes. And she emphasises the power of Kurdish resistance.

Hazel was observing the election at the invitation of the DEM Party, and was sent to village polling stations in the Şirnak (Şirnex) mountains. She describes a heavily militarised region, and militarised police and armoured vehicles outside the polling stations. Despite having become accustomed to the constant military presence, voters described feelings of intimidation and psychological pressure on account of the people outside the polling stations, who included families of AKP members.

Hazel saw a military helicopter that they were informed had brought soldiers to vote, and witnessed a long line of soldiers in civilian dress waiting to cast their ballots. But the observers were restricted in where they could go, and in inspecting voter lists.

She contrasted the victory celebrations in Diyarbakir (Amed) with the anger and worry in Şirnak – at the stolen election due to the votes of thousands of soldiers brought from

outside, and at the prospect of the coming years of AKP control. And she described the immediate post-election repression and arrests in Şirnak.

Hazel attended protest statements in Amed, following the government's refusal to recognise the elected mayor of Van, and observed the importance of the presence of the Saturday Mothers.

She finished by trying to convey the sense of powerful resistance that she could feel in the Kurdish region and that she was reluctant to leave behind.

Below is the full transcript of the interview:

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So, Hazel, obviously a lot has happened since the actual election itself, but you were there to observe the election, so I think we should start with that. And I wondered, for the benefit of people who've not been to a Turkish election, if you could just describe – well, describe where you went, where you were – but also what the polling station is like, who's allowed in, what sort of privacy you get for voting, what sort of security there is to protect the ballots themselves, and whether there's pressure on the voters from people outside.

Yeah, so I've also been to the general election last year, which was a little bit different to this year's municipal elections, and I think it's also a little bit regional. So, all over Kurdistan region, also Turkey, it's generally in schools that people go to vote, and there are certain laws pertaining to the schools. So, for example, police shouldn't have weapons with them if they're actually inside the polling booth, like the room that people are voting in. And last year, there was a proper booth inside the polling stations that did afford people a bit more privacy, but I didn't personally see that at this one, but we were in quite a remote village in

Şîrnak province, and it was called Beytüşşebap in Turkish, or İlkê in Kurdish. And yeah, there wasn't actually really any privacy, to be honest, in the rooms, but people will make their vote, and there's a sort of desk that people from each party – so DEM Party, AK Party, CHP – they all also sit in the room as well, and they're kind of responsible for overseeing the process. So, there's a bit of a collective management of the day, and there's quite a lot of people from each political party there as well, and also outside the schools, and I'm sure we'll get into this more later. It does depend on the region, so what we saw in İlkê or Beytüşşebap is, there's the Jandarma outside the schools, which is like militarised police, and there's also plainclothes police, and also uniformed, but there's the militarised and armored vehicles outside.

**So, did you get a sense that there was pressure on voters?**

So, this is what we asked people, actually, who were there, and they did tell us that they did feel quite a bit of pressure, and I think that also, one thing to keep in mind is that, actually, there's a normalisation of the militarisation of the region, because there's checkpoints, there's military checkpoints when you move inside or outside of the cities in Kurdistan region. You can see the Jandarma (Gendarmerie), or the military – there's military bases all over the place, inside cities, etc. So, I think that there is a desensitisation, actually, as well; but of course, it does also create the psychological pressure, and for example, there was big families from the AK Party outside in the school grounds that we saw ourselves, and it was like an extended family. And people were also telling us this is also a type of psychological pressure, and they also felt intimidated. And it was also reported that – not where we were, but at another location – that some of the police did have weapons with them inside the schools, as well.

**And anyway, they're allowed weapons just outside the schools.**

Yes, they're allowed weapons outside of the schools, including the military vehicles themselves, which were literally parked right outside the gates, literally right opposite the entrance to the schools, multiple ones, actually. And also, one thing that we saw too is a military helicopter actually landing directly next to the school, which we were told was bringing soldiers in from Şirnak, like central, the actual city. And then, you know, we were in quite a remote area up the mountains, and we went to the first school, and then we went to two others, and then we were told, oh, go back to the first school, because now a lot of soldiers have just come. And you know, in the region, it's occupied militarily, so there are soldiers around, but people know who are the local soldiers. You know, there's not thousands and thousands of soldiers in each place, usually. And when we went back to the first school, there was this long line of soldiers in plain clothes who were waiting to vote, and it was a very, very tense atmosphere, and we basically were quite abruptly asked to leave.

They wouldn't actually let us be present inside the polling station on that occasion. And yeah, we saw the helicopter, because it wasn't there when we first arrived, and then when we went to the schools, and then it had arrived, and then it left when we were there.

**And were people able to see the voters' lists there? Were all these soldiers' names on the voters' lists?**

So, one of our friends who was with us – one of our colleagues who was with us, who was also doing the observations, she has a press card, she's a journalist, she was allowed to look, but we were not allowed, and we were barred from looking at the lists. But there is many, many areas that people have had more access to the lists, and Şirnak is one of them, Şirnak Central, that has shown hundreds and hundreds of male names who – and no women at some addresses at all – but just hundreds and hundreds of male names, which aren't normal

military bases. And what we were told is that this is basically soldiers coming from outside, who have been sent here by the state, and they are using other people's addresses to be able – because you know it's municipal, so you have to have like a specific local registered address to be able to vote in that district. And yeah, there's been like a lot of this military people coming and voting.

**Over 6,000 in Şirnak, I think.**

**I know at the general election there was a lot of concern about guarding the ballot boxes, and then there were also problems about changes made when the votes were transferred onto the final system. Were either of those issues this time around, or not?**

Yeah, so this was definitely a thing last time. There was really clear evidence, for example, of votes getting transferred from DEM Party to MHP last time – well it was Yeşil Sol (Green Left) Party last year, but to MHP – and then they even ended up being transferred back in the appeals process at points, but I haven't heard of that myself this time. But also, it's one of those things that, you know, I think it's really hard sometimes to catch the ways that manipulation happens. And there's been really widespread observation amongst the independent observers about this practice with the soldiers, and this is something that – it's in specific areas, it doesn't happen in every single area, obviously – but it's, yeah, it's very difficult to appeal this process. And it didn't really seem like the ballot box issue was something that was really focused on this year, but they were already aware of the extra people signing up in the municipalities this time, so that has been the main focus this year.

**I heard calls for guarding the ballot boxes, but I didn't hear of any actual concerns, I think.**

I haven't heard of any myself.

**And what immediately afterwards, as the results started coming in – I mean, before things started happening in Van – what was the general view of the elections from the DEM Party, because I think you were with people in the party after the elections as well.**

Yeah, so I mean, I was in two different places – in Şirnak at first, and then I went back to Amed. And it was really different in both places, because, you know, in Şirnak, people were really hurting, because AK Party, for the central area, was elected again. And people were pretty furious, and also worried. People are really worried about their future, and they're very angry, because they feel it's a very, very undemocratic process. And straight afterwards, on the same day as the elections, there was an attack on the party office by the police, and they arrested at least a dozen people, I think two dozen people – so two of the responsables in DEM Party, and then also quite a few youth as well. And when we were leaving the next day, we heard that the DEM Party members had been released, but a lot of the local young people were still being detained. And this is just like a kind of – I think that that's very symbolic, actually, because straight away, there's repression. And I mean – you just mentioned Van already, but even when there is a secure vote for the DEM Party, it doesn't mean that repression doesn't come. But when people don't have control of their own municipality, and that really affects, you know, funding, that affects education, that affects all of these different things. It affects also, you know, state propaganda. It affects state control, it affects state access to the border – for example, going south and east, and Şirnak is a really strategic location for the state's war policies. All of these things are affected in people's everyday lives. And somebody – not a DEM Party member, but just like a local person – was saying to me – he was saying, I'm really worried about my child's future. She's only three years old, but

again, and again, and again, this keeps happening. I don't know what I can do. And then for DEM Party, people were really exhausted, but they were just busy the entire time. They were saying, we're going to appeal this, we're not going to stand for this, you know, they have cheated the system. And there was this feeling of loss.

But there wasn't much, I've seen in Western media. There's been a lot of dialogue around – oh, CHP, they've done so well; oh, this is such a win for democracy, because AKP have done really badly in this election. But people don't talk about the Kurdistan region, and don't see that AK Party can't even – they can't even keep hold of their own seats in the West. But still, they try and coup them, basically, from the Kurdish regions, for their war policies, and for political reasons.

But when I went back to Amed – so I didn't see it myself, because we're in Şirnak, but I did see a lot of videos that showed there was a big celebration. People were really happy, but there was this focus on the other regions, it wasn't cut off. I think the first day, people were dancing in the streets, big, big celebrations, but by the time we got back, people were just really focused on Şirnak, and then also the other regions where AKP had sent soldiers, or just where they'd also just done well, you know. And then, also what happened in Van after. So, yesterday, all day, there was just announcements, protests. The people in DEM Party were incredibly busy, I have to say, from morning until evening, just full-on organising: visiting the family of the martyr, the shaheed [the DEM Party election official who was killed in a polling station dispute]; organising announcements, where police also repressed people, and two people were arrested from that – nothing like what we've seen in the further east regions, where people have been really being attacked viciously by the police, and, you know, there's a bigger answer, I think, there – but still, people were then focused on that...

It's not clear what's going to happen now. I was asking people. I was saying, do you think that... will come again, is this going to be the policy of the state this time, because it happened so much last municipal election. And people's answer was just, we just don't know. We just don't know what's going to happen. It's just very unclear.

**Which is frightening in itself, of course, the not knowing. So, I don't know when you had to leave that area. Were you able to see any of the protests about what was happening in Van?**

In Amed. Yeah.

**Reactions to the removal of the mayor, of the elected mayor in Van – were you able to see any of the reactions to that?**

Yeah, in Amed, I went to a couple of the announcements and protests, and the thing is, like, even just an announcement, which is what it actually was – or announcement is maybe not quite the right translation, but a kind of, like a statement against what happened – like, even these things, when they're made publicly, are very, very, criminalised by the police. So, maybe in Western Europe you could make a statement saying, oh, the state did this, and it wasn't good, blah, blah. But, in Bakur [North Kurdistan/southeast Turkey] you're surrounded by armed police, armoured vehicles. Lots of people already have criminal cases or have spent a significant time in prison, and these are the kind of things that can certainly get people arrested again and sent to prison. So, there's quite high stakes, even with just standing up and denouncing ...

And there was one protest outside one of the legal centres, and that was made by DEM Party members, and two of the MPs, so one person was Abbas Şahin, and then also Pınar as well. They're both MPs in Amed region. And then also, directly after that, there was another announcement in a park in Amed, and that was by the Democracy Platform, which is particularly,

like a labour platform.

**And there were people from other parties or from...**



Vigil for forced disappearances

Yeah, I mean, in general, the people who attended, it wasn't only DEM Party members who were there. It's just people in the community, basically, people who agree with the fact that what happened in Van was extremely undemocratic and unfair, and it didn't reflect the will of the people. And the second event, I'm not sure, I would need to find out exactly which groups it was present, actually, and yeah, but there was, like, a kind of mix of people from, like, various groups, and also non-affiliated people as well. Not everyone was specifically a member of a specific organisation who was present. There was, oh, and the Saturday Mothers as well, the mothers of the martyrs, and also of the missing people who had disappeared in the 90s. So, when everyone was going to this court in the first

announcement, the first denunciation, some people tried to enter. And they weren't allowed, of course, they weren't allowed to go in, but there was this big crowd of people, maybe a couple hundred people, and the mothers who, you know, they were walking as a group, and they have the white veils on their head, they're very, very distinctive. And they're really, really, really strong embodiments of the principles of the struggle there, and what people sacrificed, and what people continue to do as well, despite such a deep and painful struggle. They tried to get in, and when they first came, everyone started clapping and applauding, and people were chanting. It was really, really beautiful to see how people reacted to their presence as part of that struggle, and part of the wider statement. And they were also at the second denunciation as well, which was in the park. They didn't speak at

it, but there was – yeah, like I said, it was kind of a mix of people present, and – just one second, I’m just gonna check something... I had a thing where I wrote down the chants that people were making, but I’m just struggling to find it...

You were looking for the chants that were said at these demonstrations, so do give us some examples.

Yeah, so, well, one chant that people were chanting is, long live the resistance of Van, so, “Biji Berxwedana Wanê”, and also, “Resistance is Life”, and also, “Kurdistan will become a grave for fascism”, and, yeah, I thought it was just a very – like, every time somebody would make a speech, the young people in the crowd would start leading the chants. Yeah, that was all.

**So, is there anything else you want to add before I let you go and catch your plane?**

It’s really hard to – I thought there is something that I want to add, but it’s really hard to put into words. And I feel really, like I really wish that I wasn’t leaving now, because the different layers of society that say, and one of the other chants, the translation in English is, “we will win by resisting”. I think that that is just such a present spirit and energy, and that is something that is really beautiful and inspiring; and yeah, I’m sure that people really will resist. And if it really is the case that the mayor has, again, been reappointed, I think that that really just shows like that chant, that we will win by resisting, is completely true. And whatever happens now, because I think that the democratic process is completely – it’s not respected in Kurdistan region

especially. And I think that we need to stop invisibilising the politics there, when we talk about Turkey as a whole, and the democratic process in Turkey as a whole, and, you know, not see CHP as this kind of – oh great, everything's answered now, blah, blah, blah. I think that, yeah, the struggle is really alive, and we also need to find ways to support it, that's all.

**Thank you, and bring that spirit of struggle back to Scotland with you. Thanks very much.**

Thank you for having me.

*Sarah Glynn is an activist from Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan who writes for Medya News.*

**For a full report of the local election results and the successful resistance movement to the annulment and subsequent reinstatement of the successful DEM candidate in the municipality of Van, see Sarah Glynn's article 'Resistance Works!'**

**<https://medyanews.net/resistance-works-a-weekly-news-review/>**

*Interview originally published by Medya News:*  
<https://medyanews.net/from-a-polling-station-in-the-sirnak-mountains-an-interview-with-hazel-an-election-observer-from-scotland/>

*Note by Ecosocialist.scot: [1] **DEM Party – Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party** is a pro-Kurdish political party in the Turkish state. It is the legal successor of the Green Left Party (Yesil Sol) and with the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) handing over its work to this party in 2023, it has become the*

*latest iteration of Kurdish interests in Turkey. It won 10 provinces and 2.6 million votes (5.7%), the fourth highest vote in the elections of 31 March.*

*Photo: DEM Party Election Rally, Medya News*

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## **We can never forget Palestine**

*The latest post on [MedyaNew](#) by Sarah Glynn, Scottish Kurdish rights activist, talking on the relevance of Gaza to the Kurdish struggle and video on Twitter/X.*

**Sarah Glynn, herself an anti-Zionist Jew, discusses the relevance of Gaza to the Kurdish struggle. She states that the Palestinians of Gaza are undergoing a genocide. Israel's attack on Gaza will have a major international impact, as well as a direct effect on the power balance in the Middle East, Glynn says. Both Palestinians and Kurds suffer oppression under occupation, and the oppressors attempt to undermine a historic solidarity between the oppressed, the columnist warns, while**

# celebrating the success of the Kurdish Freedom Movement as a model of peaceful coexistence in the fractured multi-ethnic region.

**Sarah Glynn**

□ [@sarahrglynn](#) | Social scientist Sarah Glynn links the Palestinian cause and the Kurdish movement, in terms of occupation, oppression and resistance. [#Palestine](#) | [#Occupation](#) | [#Genocide](#)

□ <https://t.co/0eHRGxSApz> [pic.twitter.com/jTc3WnMbeN](https://pic.twitter.com/jTc3WnMbeN)

– MedyaNews (@1MedyaNews) [March 11, 2024](#)

There is little that can be said about Palestine that has not already been said. There are no words left to describe the horror of the images daily streamed from Gaza, the brutality of the Israeli government that is inflicting this horror, and the depraved callousness of the international politicians who are enabling it. We are living through an epoch-changing moment, but I want to talk here about its specific relevance to the Kurds and the Kurdish struggle, and why no Kurd can ever forget Palestine. Some of these reasons are universal ones, others are specifically Kurdish.

The first reason is a simple one. The Palestinians of Gaza are undergoing a genocide, and nothing can ever justify that – not morally, and [not legally either](#). This genocide is being committed brazenly in the full view of the whole world and with the complicity of international governments; only the biggest of mass mobilisations can stop it.

Second, the impact of what is happening in Palestine will be of huge global importance. It raises vital questions about the

nature and feasibility of international law, and feeds into the changing balance of world power. The repeated exposure of Western, and especially American, hypocrisy will have international implications.

Third, more specifically, Israel's attack on Gaza is having a direct effect on the balance of forces in the Middle East. What is happening in Palestine impacts every part of Kurdistan. In North and East Syria, Kurds fighting ISIS have a [tactical alliance with the United States](#) (an uncomfortable position to be in) and both have come under fire from pro-Iranian militias under the banner of the Axis of Resistance. In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is trying to present himself as the leading defender of the Palestinians (even while still trading with Israel and enabling the passage of [over 40% of Israel's oil](#) supplies that come from Azerbaijan). In Iraq, America's support for Israel is putting US forces under increasing pressure to leave the country. And in Iran, the regime is using Gaza to strengthen their position on the international stage, and to present themselves as on the right side of history. All this is in addition to the [serious danger](#) of the fighting spreading to other parts of the Middle East.

Fourth, both Palestinians and Kurds suffer oppression from occupying powers, and they have historically show solidarity with each other's struggles. Turkey and Israel share a similar colonial and ruthless approach to the main 'other' ethnic group over which they attempt to maintain control. Both deny basic rights and freedoms, including the right of self-determination. Both are quick to brand any-and-all resistance as 'terrorism', and to use this to justify brutal suppression. Both have no qualms about extending their classification of terrorists to include a whole population, and subjecting that population to collective punishment, including the destruction of homes and displacement of long-established communities. Both carry out aggressive invasions under the pretence of

defence. Statements put out by Presidents Erdoğan and Netanyahu are [almost interchangeable](#), if you just swap “Kurds” with “Palestinians”.

Historically, there was strong mutual support between the PKK and leftist groups in the PLO. The Palestinians helped train the PKK guerrillas, and thirteen PKK guerrillas died fighting against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Connections have been kept up by the Kurdish Freedom Movement more generally. Leyla Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is a supporter of the pro-Kurdish leftist People’s Democratic Party (HDP, now the DEM Party), and draws parallels between the Palestinian and Kurdish struggles and between the oppressions that both peoples face. At the HDP’s 2018 congress, she [condemned](#) Turkey’s invasion of Afrîn, and the following year she [visited](#) hunger-striking MP, Leyla Güven, and supported the hunger strikers’ call for an end to the isolation of Abdullah Öcalan.

At the same time, and this is my fifth point, there is pressure to destroy Kurdish-Palestinian solidarity – a destruction that would only benefit the oppressors. While Erdoğan pretends to be a friend of the Palestinians, Zionists pretend to be friends of the Kurds.

Zionists also portray everything that is happening now as being a response to the 7 October attack by Hamas, rather than the reality which is that it is part of a 75-year history of Zionist settler colonialism, 56 years of Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, and sixteen years of Israel’s blockade that turned Gaza into a vast concentration camp. Then – led by Netanyahu – they are insisting that Hamas is equivalent to ISIS – which they are not.

Hamas came to control Gaza because Israel refused to work honestly with the older secular Palestinian organisations, reneging on every agreement that the Palestinians conceded to. They undermined the PLO and destroyed their credibility, and

at the same time, they encouraged the growth of Hamas as a way to implement their own policy of “divide and rule”. (Abdullah Öcalan [warned](#) that Turkey was attempting to create similar destructive divisions among the Kurds through promotion of the far-right Kurdish Islamist group, HÜDA-PAR.)

Hamas is an Islamist organisation: they don't support the idea of the separation of religion and politics, but believe that all of life, including politics, should be informed by religion and in conformity with religious law. In addition, and this is a separate issue, they condone attacks on Israeli civilians as a method of struggle. However, no one can genuinely compare life in Gaza with life under ISIS. By contrast, legitimate comparisons can be and are made between life in Israel/Palestine and life under South African apartheid, or even life in 1930s Germany. And Netanyahu's Zionism builds its support through [a brutal distortion of Judaism](#) that is being used to justify the murder of Palestinian children.

As cannot be repeated too often, opposing genocide is a fundamental human duty, and does not imply support for Hamas. We should be seriously worried about the growth of politics dictated by religion – any religion – though the extent of Palestinian support for this is unknown and currently unknowable. And, irrespective of the contested details of what happened on 7 October, we must also condemn all attacks that target civilians, which cross a fundamental ethical red line. But we won't draw people away from Hamas by keeping silent on the cause of Palestinian freedom – and even Palestinian survival – because we don't like Hamas' ideology and methods.

And lastly, and this time positively, with its emphasis on peaceful coexistence through bottom-up democracy, the Kurdish Freedom Movement can provide a model for a different way of understanding and organising society in this fractured multi-ethnic region. Outsiders cannot specify how others choose to organise their lives, but, as people look for a way out of

this nightmare, they can be encouraged and emboldened by an example that has come out of Middle East society and has taken root where it might not have been thought possible.

Informed by Öcalan's philosophy, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (of the region known as Rojava) promotes a bottom-up democracy where decisions are made as close to where people live as possible, where women's rights are actively supported and patriarchal relations discouraged, and where care is taken to involve all ethnic groups in organisation at all levels.

The administration recognises differences in culture and the importance of different cultures, and it enables people from those different cultures to work together. This week, in majority-Arab Raqqa – the city that ISIS made their capital – women are loudly and publicly celebrating international women's day. The focus on coexistence contrasts with the ethnic nationalism promoted by nation states, which Öcalan argues are an [intrinsically oppressive](#) form of organisation.

I am not a Kurd and cannot presume to speak for the Kurdish community. I speak only as a social scientist, and as a Jew who has long recognised Zionism as a colonial and racist project, and protested against it – as many Jews have done since Zionism was invented at the end of the nineteenth century. [Rather than ending the scourge](#) of antisemitism, Zionism has fuelled new oppressions, and now this unimaginable horror.

Experience and reading have taught me that struggles against oppression in different places are strengthened by mutual support, while absence of support strengthens the oppressors. And that every time one oppressive nation gets away with impunity it encourages other oppressors.

I have also noted that the Kurdistan Communities Union – the umbrella body that includes the PKK and all the groups that

follow Öcalan's philosophy – has [expressed solidarity](#) with the Palestinian struggle while condemning the methods of Hamas, and that there have been [clear statements](#) from the DEM Party (formerly the HDP) calling for real support for the Palestinian people in place of Erdoğan's hypocrisy.

As they both point out, the Kurdish movement, inspired by Öcalan, has a unique contribution to make to any future resolution of Middle East Politics, through a model of different communities working together. The movement has attempted to put Öcalan's ideas into practice in North and East Syria, and sees this as an example for the whole of Syria, for the Middle East, and beyond. But it is an example that risks being lost and forgotten in the ongoing power struggles.

\*Sarah Glynn is a writer and activist – check her [website](#) and follow her on [Twitter](#).

Republished from MedyaNews and Twitter/X  
<https://medyanews.net/we-can-never-forget-palestine/>

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## **Scottish Kurds protest against Erdoğan invitation**

*Kurds in Scotland and their supporters have protested at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh against any invitation to Turkish state President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to visit Scotland, reports Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot.*

The apparent invitation arose after Scottish First Minister,

and leader of the governing Scottish National Party (SNP), Humza Yousaf met briefly with the Turkish state President while they were both in Dubai in December 2023 for the COP28 summit. Kurds are angry that Erdoğan is using the Gaza crisis to launch military attacks on Kurdish populations inside both the Syrian and Iraqi state and continue his persecution and murderous policies towards the 10 million Kurds inside the Turkish state. In the Kurdish-led liberated region of Rojava in neighbouring Syria, Erdoğan has [committed exactly the same sort of brutal bombing and attacks on civilian infrastructure](#) that he accuses Israel of in Gaza.



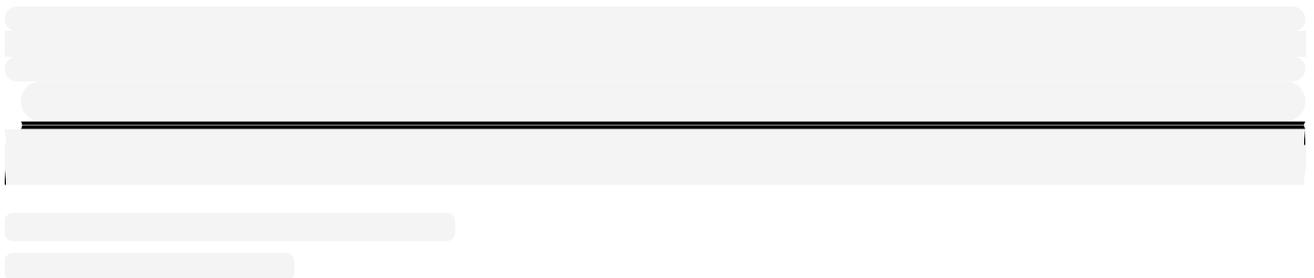
Damage caused by Turkish air attacks on civilian electricity infrastructure in Suwaydiyah North & East Syria. Photo: Rojava Information Center

So when news that Yousaf had invited Erdoğan to Scotland came out in the media in January 2024, Kurdish and solidarity organisations such as [Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan](#), alongside trade unionists Mike Arnott of the Scottish TUC and Stephen Smellie of UNISON Scotland, moved swiftly to condemn the invitation by issuing a public letter of protest. The Kurdish community in Scotland organised a demonstration at the Scottish Parliament on 25 January to demand the SNP refuse to invite Erdoğan and instead condemn his regime's murderous policy against the Kurds. The protestor's views were recorded by progressive media outlet The Skotia on Instagram (video

below) and the open letter of protest received [wide media coverage](#).



[View this post on Instagram](#)



A post shared by Media for a better Scotland. (@theskotia)

Prominent Glasgow SNP councillor Roza Salih, herself a refugee from Iraqi Kurdistan, had previously drawn attention to the matter in a post in December on Twitter/X in December, covered by The National daily newspaper:

*“Humza being friendly and laughing with Erdogan is an offence to the Kurdish people”*

*Roza Salih, Scotland’s first refugee councillor, has criticised Humza Yousaf for shaking hands with the Turkish president <https://t.co/XHu2iH28P0>*

– The National (@ScotNational) [December 2, 2023](#)

## **International Movement demands release of Öcalan on 25th Anniversary of his incarceration**

Meanwhile the Kurdish movement internationally is organising a global mobilisation to demand the release of Kurdish political leader, **Abdullah Öcalan**, with demonstrations across Europe up to the **25th Anniversary** of his unjust imprisonment and solitary confinement by the Turkish state. An Internationalist Long March is poised to spotlight this anniversary, beginning in Basel-Switzerland on 10 February, and will include key events such as a conference in Strasbourg on 15 February and a pan-European demonstration in Cologne and Düsseldorf, Germany, on 17 February. SNP Westminster Member of Parliament, Tommy Sheppard, recently met with Öcalan’s lawyers at the Council of Europe meeting and has written to UK government foreign secretary to call on him to take up Öcalan’s incarceration by the Turkish government and demand his release (text below).



# **Text of Open Letter by Kurdish solidarity organisations and individuals on the invitation of Turkish president Erdoğan to Scotland**

## *STATEMENT:*

*We, the undersigned, condemn the invitation that the First Minister of Scotland, Humza Yousaf, has made to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.*

*The Turkish state's record on human rights abuses is well documented, both internally and externally. Women, ethnic minorities and migrants bear the brunt of its oppressive policies. In particular, the Turkish state continues a policy against the Kurdish people that seeks to suppress basic human rights and political autonomy through military force, legal repression, and assimilationist policies.*

*Erdogan's party destroys civilian infrastructure beyond Turkey's own borders for political leverage and to disempower an already economically disadvantaged population in Syria and Iraq. Yousaf's response to journalists was dismissive when challenged on this. We condemn the cooperation between Erdogan and any segment of the British state. The First Minister's response to press questioning whether the invitation was "a good idea considering his treatment of the Kurds" was that "as a NATO ally", it was a legitimate invitation "if he was visiting the UK". This is hypocritical: The SNP positions itself as distinct from Westminster and with a more discerning eye towards human rights abuses and regional autonomy.*

*While Erdogan has been vocally supportive of Palestinians, 40% of oil imports to Israel come via Turkey, and the two governments have a long term and high value arms industry relationship that has been ongoing throughout the periods of intensification in Israeli attacks over the last decade. Erdogan does to the Kurds everything that he accuses Netanyahu of doing to the Palestinian people. Both Israel and Turkey have been crafting a Middle East where business and trade with western countries are more valuable than justice or freedom. The power to define terrorism and the legitimate use of violence are now highly developed tools to repress even the most basic self-determination of peoples.*

*From January 13th – 16th 2024, Turkish military forces carried out 224 ground and air strikes in north-eastern Syria, targeting agricultural and energy infrastructure such as oil fields. In nine locations, electric power stations were struck, which led to power outages and water supply issues that are currently affecting millions of people. This type of attack is a frequent but under reported reality and Erdogan is exploiting this moment when the world media is rightfully watching Gaza. The targeting of vital infrastructure is itself a war crime and these attacks are also an unprovoked act of aggression.*

*BAE Systems, Thales, Leonardo and other weapons manufacturing companies that have factories in Scotland supply both Israel and Turkey. In 2019, white phosphorous – banned for use as an incendiary chemical weapon – was reported to have been used by the Turkish military in north-eastern Syria. An investigation at the time showed 70 British export licenses for phosphorous.*

*Domestically in Turkey, the political repression of the left-wing parliamentary party HDP has led to more than five thousand of its members being arrested, the stripping of MPs' parliamentary immunity and their imprisonment, and widespread implementation of the "trustee" system by Erdogan's party*

*that forcibly removed all elected HDP mayors from office and replaced them with government-appointed officials. This has disproportionately affected the Kurdish people in Turkey, where attempts at democratic expression are crushed, and more than eight thousand Kurdish political prisoners are languishing in Turkish prisons. Kurdish language musicians, teachers and campaigners are often met with criminalisation – the Kurdish language is unrecognised by the Turkish parliament despite being the second most spoken language in the country, and language rights are linked to terrorism as a method of delegitimisation.*

*The UK government and the European Union countries have shrewdly wedded themselves to facilitating Erdogan's AKP government in exchange for the policing of Europe's land and sea borders and its imprisonment of displaced peoples subject to these "push-backs".*

*As residents of Scotland and members of human rights organisations, we request that the First Minister and the SNP condemn Erdogan and the AK Party for their actions. The targeting of civilian infrastructure and use of chemical weapons are war crimes, regardless of whether the state that does so is a NATO member.*

*We request Mr Yousaf's support in condemning these attacks on north-east Syria. We also ask him to assess the human rights abuses that the Kurdish peoples are subject to within the state borders of Turkey and that he supports the struggle for the freedom of political prisoners in Turkey.*

*We are in a moment that requires brave leadership on myriad human rights abuses, the repression of the self-determination of peoples and the destruction of the earth, happening across the globe. We implore the First Minister and Scottish government, particularly in this moment, to resist shallow alliances that fail to look at the geo-political situation holistically. The moment demands an uncompromising*

*acknowledgement of the colonial legacies of the current genocidal treatment of the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples.*

*We ask Mr Yousaf to meet with the Kurdish communities in Scotland and campaigners to discuss this issue. We believe that Scotland can do better and we would like to talk about how.*

#### *LIST OF SIGNATURES*

*Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan*

*Kurdish Community Scotland*

*Zagros Community Scotland*

*Women's Rights Delegation from Scotland to North and East Syria, May 2023*

*International Human Rights Delegation on political prisoners in Turkey, December 2023*

*Edinburgh University Justice for Palestine Society*

*Mike Arnott, President of Scottish Trades Union Congress*

*Stephen Smellie, Depute Convenor UNISON Scotland*

*International Solidarity Movement (ISM) – Scotland*

## **Text of Letter from SNP Westminster MP Tommy Sheppard to UK government foreign secretary David Cameron**

**TOMMY SHEPPARD MP**



*The Rt Hon Lord David Cameron*

*Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development*

*Affairs*

*Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office*

*King Charles Street*

*London*

*SW1A 2AH*

*26th January 2024*

*Dear David*

*I am writing on behalf of several constituents to ask you to make representations to the Turkish Government in the case of Abdullah Ocalan.*

*You will know that Ocalan is regarded by millions of Kurds throughout the world as their leader and he is key to achieving a permanent and peaceful solution which respects the rights of the Kurds in Turkey and neighbouring countries.*

*He has been held in solitary confinement on the island prison of Imrali for almost 25 years. This is contrary to several judgements of European Court of Human Rights which have found the manner of his detention to be in violation of the statutes to prohibit torture.*

*As a UK member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I met with Mr Ocalan's lawyers earlier this week. They tell me that he has been denied any communication with the outside world and any visits from his legal team for almost three years now.*

*This case does great damage to Turkey's reputation and is an egregious breach of international human rights law. It is also a running sore and an insult to the many thousands of Kurdish people who have made this country their home.*

*I would ask you to take up this case with the Turkish authorities, demanding that Mr Ocalan be allowed access to his lawyers, that his isolation end, and that after a quarter of a century in solitary confinement, his case is reviewed,*

*and plans made to end his incarceration.*

*I look forward to your response.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Tommy Sheppard*

*Member of Parliament for Edinburgh East*

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## **Women's Delegation from Scotland to Rojava**

*On Christmas eve as bombs dropped on Palestine, Turkey began a fresh assault on Rojava, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, destroying critical infrastructure, like power plants and grain storage, and killing civilians. Like Palestine, the ongoing struggle in Rojava is a decades (if not centuries) long fight for collective liberation and self-determination. The ongoing revolution has established a region-wide system of grassroots democracy led by women's liberation. Such liberatory realities will always be a threat to established power structures and the most recent escalation is no coincidence. Turkey's president Tayip Erdogan has already made two full ground invasions of Rojava, annexing the Afrin region in 2018, and Serekaniye in 2019. Now, he undertakes another aggression knowing that attention is elsewhere. As the events of the past few months have made visible the necessity and reality of anti-imperial struggle for so many, a group of women from Scotland who visited Rojava in 2023 reflect on the lessons from what they witnessed there for anyone interested in anti-colonial movements.*

## Why did we go?

We travelled to Rojava in spring 2023, where we met with women's groups under the umbrella of the confederal women's organisation, [Kongra Star](#). We are all organisers or activists at home, with diverse backgrounds both culturally and in struggle: such as migrant justice, feminism, anti-capitalism and campaigns against the arms trade. In different ways, we could all see ourselves reflected in the struggle and the achievements of the Rojava revolution. We all have questions, now more than ever, about how we can change the world we live in for the better, and we felt we could learn a lot from the political process there.

The Kurdistan Freedom Movement has a tradition of grassroots organising and challenging oppressive power structures instead of recreating them. The revolution has followed this philosophy, not basing the organisation of society on nationalist or ethnic lines. Kurds, Arabs, Syriacs, Ezidis and all the people of the region self-organise and develop their own strengths, coming together in structures that treats diversity as strength. Together they have created the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and are transforming their society at all levels. The philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan, with its proposals for Democratic Confederalism (the organisation of society through democratic self-organisation not state institutions) and women's liberation, is the beating heart of a revolution which has been going on for over a decade. Kurdish women had been organising for many years when opportunity for revolution arose in 2012, at which point the people of Rojava, because of this committed long-term work of organising and education, were prepared to build up a society based on women's freedom and gender liberation, pluralism, ecology, grassroots democracy and self-governance.

The special cemetery in Kobane for  
those who were lost in the war.  
Photo Credit: Jennifer Clapham

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It was one thing to read about it all and another to see it – and in just under two weeks, there was a lot to see. We clambered in and out of cars several times a day, bouncing on dusty uneven roads to one meeting after another. We filed in and out of offices, halls, yards and canvas tents, to sit on plastic chairs, colourful sofas, or cushions on the floor. We met with dozens of organisers, most of them women, who explained their stories to us with a dignity and a sense of self that was awe-inspiring. They patiently answered our questions as we hungrily tried to imprint everything on our memories. In between meetings, we were hosted in family homes, fed more than we could eat, and made friends despite language and cultural barriers.

On our first day, we visited a Jineoloji Academy, Washokani refugee camp and Jinwar village. We learnt about the work and research of Jineoloji in the first meeting: it is a science of life, society, and the creation of a new world based on women's and ecological liberation. The aim of their analysis of oppression is to solve social problems, rather than merely theorise about them. In our discussion, we compared the Western rhetoric of "rights" to the concept of "freedom" in Rojava. In our organising in Scotland, we often come across

tendencies to rely on governance structure to grant rights and solutions – e.g. by lobbying for laws or asking for grants. Freedom, as the women from the Jineoloji Academy explained to us, consists in autonomy and self-empowerment. It needs to be built from the ground up and cannot be granted from above. This encouragement of the flourishing of autonomy through collective action showed us how Rojava is a microcosm of all the world's social problems and provides inspiration for women's struggles in Scotland as well.



Arriving at Washokani refugee camp. Photo  
Credit: Jennifer Clapham

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The women-led aspect of the revolution goes beyond autonomous women's organising and encompasses the liberation of children and families as well. At Jinwar Women's Village, which started 6 years ago as one of the only women's villages in the world, we learnt about how they also organise a regular children's assembly. Its purpose is to extend democracy to the youth by encouraging them to self-organise, solve their problems, and share skills, ideas and culture. The village also embraces herbal medicine and deepens the connection to the land through growing their own food; a testament to the administration's aims of caring for the environment and sustainability. After the discussion, we shared a delicious meal made with local nutritious ingredients, and it was easy to agree with the following message, voiced earlier in the day by one of the village's inhabitants: "Women are the heart and driving force of democracy – when we come together and feel together, no one can defeat us".



Jinwar women's village. Photo  
Credit: Jennifer Clapham

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Scotland and Meeting with the women who run domestic  
learnings for us violence resolution centres. Photo Credit:

Jennifer Clapham

It was clear how much we were learning and what we were getting out of the experience. We had to ask ourselves what they felt they were getting out of giving us so much time from their busy lives. Usually, the answer came in the form of a smile and asking us to build our own revolution at home. We shuffled awkwardly, asking if there were key messages, they wanted us to bring out to the world, while we work on that one.

Spreading the word about the revolution, and the Turkish state's attempts to destroy it is a start. Rojava is a living example of how we can organise ourselves and society differently. It is direct democracy, with women involved at every level of organising, a new society with communal living at the centre. It is messy, imperfect, and still not complete – but it shows it is possible. At a time when it is hard to find any light, we must hold onto and know that a better world is possible.

The women of North and East Syria are not asking for anyone's help and are more than capable of changing their own world. Still, we were reminded many times of the UK's responsibility in the arms trade that leads to the bombs dropping on Rojava, and the complicity of global powers in the Turkish state's attacks on infrastructure. The neighbourhood communes and assemblies there lamented the shortages of water and resources, which are problems with material roots in the UK. For example, BAE systems – who have multiple sites in Scotland – are helping Turkey develop their own aircraft.

In addition to drone strikes and shelling of infrastructure, Turkey also targets political organisers, particularly women. We have already looked on, horrified, as Yusra Darwish, a friend who welcomed us with tea and discussed neighbourhood organising with us, was killed in a Turkish drone strike in June. Now we are watching as power stations, water supplies, hospitals and even the region's only oxygen factory, are targeted in an effort to break the will and the ability to survive of the people of the region. The fabric of everything that made such an impression on us, that has become an inspiration for radicals all over the world, is under attack.

### **Call to Action**

States that destroy infrastructure, kill civilians and deny people the right self-determination are a threat to democracy and liberation everywhere. And if we believe in a fairer, just

world for everyone, then we need to stand up and fight against it. We can start by breaking the silence. Share your knowledge of these attacks with your friends, discuss it with your family, and post about it online. Follow news sites like the ones detailed below.

You can also donate to Heyva Sor a Kurd (Kurdish Red Crescent) who are on the ground in North-East Syria providing vital humanitarian and medical assistance (details at end).

Lastly, join, support, or set up a local solidarity group, such as the Kurdistan Solidarity Network or Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan.

### **Stay up to date on events in the region:**

ANF News (<https://anfenglishmobile.com/> ) or Medya News (<https://medyanews.net/> ). As well as groups such as the Rojava Information Centre (Twitter: @RojavaIC ) or Riseup 4 Rojava (<https://riseup4rojava.org/> ).

Solidarity networks:

<https://kurdistansolidarity.net>

[Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan | Facebook](#) Look on Facebook: "ScottishSolidaritywithKurdistan"

### **DONATE TO HEYVA SOR HERE**

Bank account

Heyva Sor a Kurdistanê e. V.

Kreissparkasse Köln

IBAN: DE49 3705 0299 0004 0104 81

BIC/SWIFT: COKSDE33XXX

Reference: Rojava

PayPal: [paypal.me/heyvasorakurdistan](https://www.paypal.me/heyvasorakurdistan)

Contact and further information: [www.heyvasor.com](http://www.heyvasor.com)

E-Mail: [heyvasor@web.de](mailto:heyvasor@web.de)

Phone: +49 (0) 2241 975 25 83

Instagram: heyvasor

Twitter: @Heyva\_\_Sor

Facebook: Heyva Sor a Kurdistanê e.V.

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<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2024/01/07/womens-delegation-from-scotland-to-rojava/>

*Main Picture: Arin Mirkan square in liberated Kobane, pivotal in the fight against ISIS. Photo Credit: Jennifer Clapham*



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# Internationalism Beyond the Geopolitics of States and Principled Solidarity in “Complex” Situations: Kurdish and Palestinian Solidarity

*The ongoing war in Gaza has overshadowed global awareness of the situation not just in Ukraine but in Kurdistan too. Under cover of the Gaza invasion by Israel, Turkey's President Erdogan has used the opportunity to attack the Kurdish liberated region in north and east Syria. There are complex interrelationships of international solidarity movements that are explored in the following article published in October 2023 from a US-based academic, which raises important issues about internationalism that is framed within the confines of the nation-state. [ecosocialist.scot](https://ecosocialist.scot) is publishing this article as part of a contribution to discussion on the issue of international solidarity and principled internationalism in Scotland.*

By : Ozlem Goner

On 4 October Turkey started yet another series of attacks into the Kurdish-majority region of Rojava (North and East Syria) and [destroyed](#) 80% of the civilian infrastructure, including fifty schools and two hospitals. Dozens have died so far, and millions have been left without electricity and water. [Turkey's excuse](#) this time was a bombing undertaken by two members of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK) against the General Security Forces of the Turkish state in Ankara, which injured two security officials. Turkey has long claimed

that the People's Protection Units in Rojava (YPG) is the same organization as the PKK and claimed [without proof](#) that the actual attackers have come from this region. As I am writing this, Turkey continues to wipe out the region with its airstrikes and the world once remains silent again.

Two days after the re-escalation of Turkey's ongoing attacks, the world was shaken by the killing of over a thousand Israeli citizens by Hamas and other organizations that have joined forces with Hamas despite their ideological and political differences from the former. Israel, like Turkey, produced a lot of [fake news](#) and used the attacks as an excuse to wipe down the entire Gaza strip, an open-air prison, created in the first place by Israeli settler colonialism. The attacks targeting Israeli citizens are a symptom of ongoing colonial violence, which has left colonized Palestine without any other means of self-defense. Instead of rethinking the context of the Hamas attack, Israel, assisted by Western politicians and the media, embarked on a full-scale genocidal project of further dehumanizing Palestinians through openly racist discourse and calls for torture.

The distancing of segments of Kurdish activists from Palestinian solidarity through a critique of Hamas at this moment is a symptom of a particular form of internationalism that is centered around states, an internationalism that seeks purity through politically correct actions from the colonized without due attention to the ongoing conditions of colonization and oppression.

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One such autocratic leader is the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has condemned Israel's violence against Palestine, and has been playing the peacemaker role promoted even by progressive networks like [Democracy Now](#), which gave extensive coverage of Erdoğan's speech on Palestine, ignoring completely that the same Erdoğan has been wiping down Rojava at the very same time. Turkey's hypocrisy, and the fact that some progressive circles have cherished this double-faced "peace-maker," have frustrated Kurdish activists, some of whom have distanced themselves from Palestinian solidarity at this crucial moment. For example, the progressive all women's Kurdish news outlet [Jinnews](#) published an article with the unfortunate title of "Are peoples confined to choosing either

Palestine or Israel?" Although this article and many other Kurdish progressive venues framed their distancing as having to do with Hamas and rightly argued that Palestine is much larger than Hamas, one should not forget that framing this particular context around a critique of Hamas has legitimized ongoing settler colonial violence as it enters a new stage of complete genocidal annihilation.

I suggest that the distancing of segments of Kurdish activists from Palestinian solidarity through a critique of Hamas at this moment is a symptom of a particular form of internationalism that is centered around states, an internationalism that seeks purity through politically correct actions from the colonized without due attention to the ongoing conditions of colonization and oppression. This type of internationalism has been prevalent among many progressive circles. I will focus here on Kurdish solidarity with Palestine, and US progressives' solidarity with broader Kurdistan, especially with Rojava, which is currently being wiped out by the Turkish state.

## **Problems with Geopolitical Internationalism**

Certain segments of the Kurdish movement have rightly problematized Hamas from a geopolitical angle. Hamas has historically been close to Turkey. Khaled Mashal, former Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, once celebrated Turkey's settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing in Afrin of North and East Syria, [saying](#) "Turkey's success, especially in Afrin, sets a serious example. Hopefully, we will all be blessed with the victories of the Islamic Ummah in many parts of the world, as in Afrin." Moreover, around 14,000 people in Rojava died fighting against the Islamic State backed by Turkey, which makes Kurdish populations rightly wary of other religious fundamentalist organizations. Similarly, Hamas is

rhetorically, if not materially, supported not only by Turkey but also by the Islamic Regime of Iran, which, like Turkey, has been notoriously oppressive against the Kurdish populations and organizations, as the ongoing [Jina uprisings](#) have revealed. Finally, the Turkish state has even placed some Palestinian refugees in the region of Afrin as part of its population exchange campaigns to rid the area of its indigenous Kurdish populations, an act of ethnic cleansing. These realities on the ground create difficult emotions, which result in some segments of the Kurdish political movement distancing themselves from Palestinian solidarity.

I argue that even though it is easy to understand the feelings that lead to this distancing, it is politically damning to base organizational solidarity politics around feelings. Crucially, these are feelings of geopolitical internationalism centered around nation-states, where progressives relate to countries and groups based on how their “own” or “oppressor” (evil) states *feel* about a given conflict. For example, a dissident from Turkey feels the need to distance themselves from all states and groups that Turkey provides support to. This dynamic is especially prevalent in solidarity politics in the United States. Large segments of progressives in the US approach internationalism as necessitating solidarity with countries and groups the US seemingly opposes, and denying solidarity to countries and groups the US seemingly supports. Even though this stance might have proved useful, especially given historical and ongoing US imperial violence, it is based on a priori geopolitical demarcations, as well as a frequent valorization of other imperial and colonial states and dictators just because they seem to be in opposition to the United States. Although this stance *feels* like internationalism at first, especially given the violent imperial role of the United States throughout the globe, it actually prevents an analysis of the material realities of oppression and colonization on the ground and hinders the

development of potential alliances with oppressed populations and dissident organizations in places where the United States seems to be in support.

As an alternative, internationalism from the ground is based on a material analysis of relations of colonialism and oppression; it advocates for standing in solidarity with the colonized and the oppressed in all contexts and for developing alliances with actual grassroots organizations. If, for instance, one focuses on networks of global capitalism, then one sees that geopolitical demarcations and instrumental uses of solidarity by state actors are often a façade. For example, behind Erdoğan's rhetoric of solidarity, there are deep and ongoing business and military connections between Turkey and Israel. During the UN General Assembly of September 2023, Erdoğan [reported](#) that the two countries plan to raise their trade volume from \$9.5 billion to a minimum of \$15 billion and even to develop some shared ministries, to increase cooperation in energy, tourism, and technology. Even the Islamic Republic of Iran has historically [worked with Israel](#), purchasing much of the weaponry used during the Iran-Iraq War from a country they otherwise call the "evil."

Similarly, despite the fact that the United States has worked with Kurdish-majority security forces in North and East Syria to prevent the regrowth of ISIS activity, it has long [supported](#) Turkey's war against Kurdistan with material means such as military aid, sharing of intelligence, and the sale of weapons, including the war planes being used in broader Kurdistan at this moment. And the alliance with Kurdish security in the region cannot even come close to the depth of capitalist networks developed between Turkey and the United States since World War II. Hence, much of the emotional geopolitical stance, whether by certain dissidents in Turkey and Iran distancing themselves from Palestine, or by progressives in the US distancing themselves from the Kurdish-majority region of North and East Syria, is not based on the

actual material relationships between their oppressor states and other regions, countries, and groups.

Once we move beyond geopolitical internationalism and focus instead on material relationships of global capitalism between state actors, as well as on regional relationships of colonialism and oppression, internationalist solidarity with peoples and political organizations on the ground becomes much less “complicated.” This form of internationalism does not operate at the level of states, but from the ground created through solidarity networks with grassroots organizations. To achieve this form of internationalism, we need to be critical of expectations of purity from the oppressed, be it in a liberal sense of victimhood that “condemns” all “violent” action, or in a more progressive sense of political correctness, which demands a purity of political motivations and alliances without an attention to the simple needs of survival.

## **The Conundrum of Purity and Internationalism from the (Messy) Ground**

The first form of purity discourse is a liberal one that expects only “victimhood” from the colonized and the oppressed. Any action of self-defense is easily “condemned,” without an attention to the ongoing structural violence of colonialism and the agency of the oppressed to self-defend, with whatever methods available to them. Even those who are more conscientious of political agency, and aware of the limited availability of means of self-defense, sometimes fall into this liberal trap. From the site of any so-called “violent” action emerges a false discourse of “two sides,” a condemnation of violence from “both sides,” which not only obscures the structural and systematic reality of colonial violence, but also the fact that the colonized have very

limited methods of self-defense available to them. In the case of Palestine, it is because the Palestinian opposition does not have a violent military force with airplanes and tanks to defend themselves against Israeli settler colonialism that they resort to actions like the killing of civilians. Somehow, the latter appears to be “more brutal” than decades of settler colonial violence at the hands of a gigantic military force funded by multiple states. This is not a defense of Hamas or its actions, but a call to realize that Hamas and the particular actions it undertakes are a product of Israeli settler colonialism, not vice versa.

Those who are aware of the problems with this false discourse of “two sides,” quickly separate Hamas from the Palestinian people and condemn the former, while showing some nominal solidarity with the latter. Of course, it would be a mistake to reduce Palestinian movements, let alone Palestinian people, to Hamas and its actions. The Israeli state was involved in the [creation of Hamas](#) and Israeli and Western media have used such reductionist discourses equating Hamas and Palestine to legitimize Israel’s settler-colonialism in Gaza and the rest of Palestine for decades now. However, one should not forget that many other organizations in Palestine acknowledge the latest action as an act of self-defense, and that a “condemnation” of Hamas in this particular context, as well as analyses based on the so-called “violence by two sides,” legitimizes the genocidal violence Israel uses on Palestine. These depictions feed into a [false liberal notion of “two sides”](#) that renders the colonial reality invisible and frames colonial violence as a “conflict.” Although the Palestinian opposition is much larger than Hamas, and support for Hamas is limited among the Palestinian people, these discussions should not be relevant to our solidarity with Palestine against Israeli settler colonialism.

A second form of purity discourse, prevalent among more progressive circles is an expectation of political purity in

the alliances formed by the geopolitical framework explained above. For example, in order to be in complete solidarity with Palestine at this moment, some Kurds might expect the Palestinian opposition to avoid alliances with Turkey. Similarly, large segments of progressives in the United States, such as the DSA International, distanced themselves from the revolution in Rojava and have remained mostly silent to Turkey's ongoing genocide and femicide in the region due to the United States' tactical military involvement in the region against the Islamic State.

In simplest terms, it is crucial to understand that the politics on the ground is messy given ongoing colonization and the very lack of internationalist solidarity itself. The colonized have a right to self-defend, to survive by whatever means available to them. And when international solidarity is not available to stop the actions of colonizer states, the colonized have a right to procure the means of self-defense from whomever makes it available to them. Those who believe in anti-colonial internationalism need to stand with the colonized and not make blanket condemnations of the pragmatic relationships they need to form for survival.

Moreover, it is not the responsibility of the colonized, but of those groups and organizations in relatively more privileged positions, to look for ways to procure and sustain the means of self-defense that would afford the colonized other options than sitting at the devil's table. An internationalism from the ground requires that we study the material context deeply to understand the relationship of coloniality and oppression, and that we side with the colonized and the oppressed irrespective of the purity of their actions and the political alliances they form to survive. All the while, we can develop actual internationalist alliances from the ground so that our movements can sustain each other and we can break free of relationships with and dependencies on oppressive states.

Kurds and Palestinians in this particular context have suffered various forms of colonial violence at the hands of Turkey and Israel respectively, and it is our alliance, together with all the other colonized and oppressed populations of the Middle East and beyond, that can bring justice and peace. From learning to self-defend together, to invaluable moments of solidarity, such as [Leyla Halid's](#) visit to [Leyla Güven](#), a hunger-striking Kurdish political activist kept hostage in Turkish colonial prisons, our history is full of lessons in solidarity against the same global system of capitalist and colonialist oppression. At this moment when Rojava and Palestine are going through ethnic cleansing, it is more urgent than ever to find a principled anti-colonial internationalism from the ground.

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## **Turkey is trying to bomb Rojava out of existence**

*Sarah Glynn of Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan writes for*

## *Bella Caledonia*

**'Turkey even announced their intention to commit their latest war crime in advance. On Wednesday, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, declared that all the region's infrastructure was a legitimate target. According to international law, essential infrastructure is never a legitimate target.'** Sarah Glynn reports for Bella on the unfolding campaign to destroy the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

That little click. I check WhatsApp. 'Just now drone attacks next to my house – was bloody scary'. Only two hours earlier my friend had been sending me photographs of his village near Kobanê. Now Turkey's latest assault had caught up with him too.

Since Thursday morning, Turkey has accelerated their campaign to destroy the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. This is the region that combines predominantly-Kurdish Rojava and the adjacent majority-Arab lands that Kurdish forces liberated from ISIS. It covers around about 30% of Syria and provides home to some five million people. Thwarted, by the United States and Russia, from carrying out another invasion, Turkey is attempting to destroy the Autonomous Administration by making the life of its people impossible.

Constructing and running a new society is slow and difficult work, especially when your land has been ravaged by ISIS and your neighbours blockade your borders. But destroying a society's security and means of subsistence is simple. Bomb the power stations and substations so millions are left without electricity and there is no power for hospitals, for water pumps, for bakeries, and for the myriad other things that we take for granted. Bomb the gas bottling plant that everyone relies on for the fuel to cook their food and to heat their homes in the winter. Bomb the oil fields that not only provide vital fuel but are also the main source of revenue to support the services of daily life. Bomb grain silos, just filled with this year's harvest. Bomb factories to decimate an

economy already struggling to get off its feet. Bomb hospitals and homes so people know that nowhere and no one is safe. Turkey is doing all of these things.



Qamishlo residents queue to donate blood for the wounded

## **A pre-announced war crime**

This is illegal, of course, under international law. Targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure is regarded as a war crime. But Turkey has been committing war crimes for a long time without any comeback. International opprobrium depends on who you are and your political leverage, not on what you do. Turkey bombed the region's vital infrastructure a year ago too, though not as thoroughly as now. Since the beginning of 2021, they have cut the flow of water in the Euphrates, and, since their 2019 invasion, their mercenaries have repeatedly shut down the pumping station that supplies water to Hasaka. They have performed targeted assassinations of key Administration figures, and shelled villages to drive away their inhabitants. They have committed the biggest war crime of all in carrying out unprovoked invasions, and they have empowered and supported groups that have performed the most gratuitous and brutal atrocities.

Turkey even announced their intention to commit their latest war crime in advance. On Wednesday, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, declared that all the region's infrastructure was a legitimate target. According to international law, essential infrastructure is never a legitimate target.



Covid hospital, Derik

## A convenient pretext

So, what was Turkey's excuse and what was their reason? Two different questions with different answers.

If you were to believe Fidan, this is a legitimate response to the action last Sunday by two members of the PKK, who carried out a suicide attack on the entrance to the police headquarters attached to the Interior Ministry in Ankara, wounding two policemen. Fidan claims, on behalf of the Turkish Government, that the PKK men came through North and East Syria, and that there is no distinction between the PKK and the Peoples Defence Units (YPG), the Syrian Kurdish forces that are now part of the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF. Turkey's attack is thus presented as pre-emptive defence in the fight against terrorism, for which, as the United States has demonstrated, almost anything is permissible. Fidan actually referred to 'YPG infrastructure' as though the armed forces and civilian society were one and the same.

Every step of Fidan's argument is problematic. The Turkish Government has produced no evidence that the men came through Syria, and their presence there has been denied by both the SDF and the PKK. It is no secret that the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria is inspired by the ideas of PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, and the YPG includes fighters who have previously fought for the PKK – including the man who now commands the SDF – but the YPG and PKK are separate organisations. The YPG operates inside Syria and has never threatened Turkey. Turkey likes to quote article 51 of the UN charter, which describes the right to self-defence. There has been extensive debate over whether this includes pre-emptive action, but even where this is deemed acceptable, [customary law demands](#) that for an action to be regarded as self-defence, it must be necessary, without other alternatives, and proportional. Turkey's pulverisation of North and East Syria does not pass this test, and is very far

from proportional.

## **A useful pretext**

It is clear that Turkey has been looking for an excuse for this aggression, and that if the PKK had not attacked, they would have used something else – or even created an incident themselves. Fidan is notorious for having been [caught on tape](#) in 2014 (when he was head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation) proposing a missile strike on Turkey to make up a case for war. [A year ago](#), Turkey justified similar, though less intensive, attacks on North and East Syria by blaming the YPG for a bomb attack in Istanbul that appears to have been linked to militant Islamists – certainly not the YPG or PKK. Turkey's aggression would still have happened sometime without the PKK attack, and cannot be blamed on the PKK – though some will try and do so, which can only benefit Turkey.

The PKK's attack has also been used to justify the round-up and detention of around 250 largely-Kurdish activists within Turkey itself, including many members of the pro-Kurdish leftist Peoples' Democratic Party, the HDP. There is no reason to assume that any of them had anything to do with the attack. This is simply a bigger version of what has been happening every week, when Kurdish activists are detained for absurd and petty reasons under Turkey's endlessly elastic terrorism act.

## **Turkey's war on the Kurds**

And what of the real reasons behind Turkey's violence? The answer to this question begins 100 years ago when ethnic nationalism was made a doctrine of the new Turkish republic. Kurds were expected to turn themselves into Turks and forget about their own culture, which was harshly suppressed, and generations of Turks have been indoctrinated with anti-Kurdish rhetoric. For four decades now, the PKK, led by Abdullah Öcalan, has fought a war against the Turkish state. They

succeeded in replacing the Kurds' internalised oppression with a proud Kurdish consciousness, but not in winning external freedom. Many times during this period, the PKK has declared a unilateral ceasefire and attempted to negotiate a peace settlement, and sometimes there have been talks, but the Turkish authorities have not proved ready to allow the Kurds a dignified existence. Since the 1990s, there have also been pro-Kurdish political parties in the Turkish parliament, but their MPs and activists face harassment and imprisonment, while [successive parties have been banned and closed down](#). The most recent peace talks took place between 2013 and 2015, when there was a real sense of hope in the air. But President Erdoğan saw that this was winning support for the HDP rather than for himself and his party, and that, at the same time, Kurds across the border were beating back ISIS and strengthening their autonomous control over northern Syria. He repudiated the initial agreement in order to pursue a military 'solution' to the Kurdish Question, which he has been doing with increasing vengeance. A century of ethnic nationalism has made Kurd bashing a central plank of Turkish populism, and the hopes raised by the main opposition party for a gentler politics did not even last into the second round of the presidential election. Rallying against the Kurds has become a substitute for addressing Turkey's severe economic and social problems.

Erdoğan has always viewed the existence of an autonomous region in Kurdish Syria as a threat, and he will not rest until it is eliminated. It has never been a physical threat, but does indeed pose a political threat to the status quo by providing an example of a multicultural feminist democracy inspired by Öcalan's ideas. While ostensibly supporting the coalition against ISIS, Turkey has given ISIS assistance – not least in enabling the passage of thousands of foreign fighters – in the hope that they will put an end to regional, and especially Kurdish, autonomy. And Turkey has twice invaded the region with the help of brutal Islamist militias, to whom they

have given control over the occupied lands. Despite US and Russian negotiated ceasefires, Turkey has not stopped their low-level war of attrition against the Autonomous Administration, and if the US and Russia had not refused to move out of the way, Turkey would have carried out another land invasion.

Russia is in Syria to support the Syrian Government in the civil war. They don't want to see more land occupied by Turkey, but are happy for Turkey to weaken the Autonomous Administration, which they want to force back under President Assad's centralised control. America initially intervened in Syria by supporting opposition groups who they hoped would bring about regime change – the same violent groups that are still supported by Turkey. But when these proved unreliable partners, and when ISIS threatened to create a centre of anti-Western violence, the US moved to support the YPG (and women's YPJ) which was the only force providing effective resistance to ISIS.

America has always supported the Turkish Government against the PKK, but American troops are now also in a military partnership with the SDF (which includes the YPG). Turkey is determined to break that partnership and to persuade America that the YPG and PKK are one and the same, which is another reason for them insisting that the PKK men came from Syria.

However, that US-SDF partnership is limited to the fight against ISIS, which still retains many sleeper cells. America will not help the SDF defend themselves against Turkey, which is a NATO 'ally'. Nor will they allow them the anti-aircraft weapons they need to defend themselves, even though the insecurity created by Turkey's attacks is a gift to ISIS recruiters.

Last week, for the first time, the US brought down a Turkish drone. Of course, that particular drone was seen as threatening an American base, and the incident was followed by

top-level phone diplomacy between the US and Turkey. This sent a message that the US was not going to move out of the way, as Turkey had demanded, but all Turkey's other drones and military aircraft were left free to destroy the life and lives of the people of North and East Syria. There have been protests against lack of action by the US, which is supposed to be a guarantor of Turkey's ceasefire.

## Neo-Ottoman dreams

Erdoğan feels no need to hide his plans. Shortly before Turkey's 2019 invasion, he held up a map of Syria at the United Nations General Assembly that showed a 30km deep strip all along the Turkish border, over which Turkey demanded control. This strip included the main Kurdish areas as well as some of Syria's most fertile land. Erdoğan called it a 'safe zone', claiming it was necessary to prevent the YPG from attacking across the border. In fact, the YPG has never shown any intention of attacking Turkey, and the areas Turkey captured in 2019 have become some of the most dangerous places on earth. Kurds and other minorities have learnt to flee rather than try and survive under Turkish occupation. In a deliberate policy of demographic change, they have been replaced by families of Islamist militias and by refugees from other parts of Syria forcibly deported from Turkey.

When Turkey's modern borders were agreed in the Treaty of Lausanne, 100 years ago this year, the Turkish delegation based their negotiations on a document entitled the National Pact, drawn up in 1919-20, which claimed for Turkey all those areas with an 'Ottoman Moslem majority'. This included the predominantly Kurdish regions that the treaty subsequently awarded to Iraq and Syria. There was no separate Kurdish delegation at the Lausanne negotiations, and it was only after the Turkish republic was founded that its leaders [made horribly clear](#) that this was solely a Turkish project and not a joint Turkish-Kurdish one. For Erdoğan, the National Pact is

still on the table, and his irredentist dreams for the 'Turkish Century' also inform his desire to control the belt of land south of the Turkish border.



Electricity station, Qamishlo

## **A future in ruins**

After three days of bombardment with drones and warplanes, accompanied by intense shelling of border areas, the devastation Turkey has caused is cataclysmic. Places that have been working hard to recover from the damage caused by ISIS have seen all their hard work destroyed and more. Rebuilding will be difficult and slow, and always under the shadow of a possible repeat attack. The damage to the Suwayda gas plant alone has been estimated at over \$50 million, and essential parts are difficult to get under boycott.

There have been at least seventeen people killed and many others wounded, and the psychological toll of these never-ending attacks is impossible to measure.

The determination and resistance that defeated ISIS remains strong, but if the administration is prevented from being able to meet people's basic needs, dissatisfaction may grow among those less committed to their democratic and feminist project, especially in more tribal areas such as Deir ez-Zor. This is, of course, part of Turkey's plan.

When I spoke to my friend in Kobanê on Sunday morning all was quiet. Unlike in Qamishlo, they still had power, though only in late afternoon and evening as water levels have become so low that the turbines can't function fully. People in Kobanê have become used to drone attacks. Their biggest fear is another invasion and being displaced again, as at the time of

ISIS. No one can start new projects: they can't even plan for the next day. There is a sense that the future is out of their hands, and only God will protect them.

As I finish writing this on Sunday night, Turkey's bombardment continues along the whole border region, and calls are going out from the hospitals for people to donate blood for the wounded.

[Sarah Glynn](#)

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<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2023/10/09/turkey-is-trying-to-bomb-rojava-out-of-existence/>

*Main image: Kobane Friday 6 October 2023*



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# Worth Fighting For – Bringing the Rojava Revolution Home, Book Launch Glasgow Govan Sun 6 August

Authors Jenni and Natalia are launching their book describing their three years supporting the Kurdish Freedom Movement in Rojava.

The event in Glasgow on **Sunday 6 August 4pm-6pm** is to share the book and the ideas in it, to discuss how we can relate the revolution in Kurdistan to our own lives and to come together and celebrate struggle. They will introduce the book and come together to discuss the ideas. There will also be snacks and fiddle music. Bring friends, comrades, colleagues, kids and grans!

The event will be at [Galrael, 15 Fairley Street in Govan, Glasgow G51 2SN](#) (public transport journey planner here: [Journey Planner | SPT | Strathclyde Partnership for Transport](#))

The book is £7, distributed by Active Distribution and can be ordered [here:](https://www.activedistributionshop.org/shop/books/5436-worth-fighting-for.html)  
<https://www.activedistributionshop.org/shop/books/5436-worth-fighting-for.html>

Or from bookshops – Title: Worth Fighting For: Bringing the Rojava Revolution (Paperback – published 1 Jun. 2023) by Jenni Keasden (Author), Natalia Szarek (Author), Matt Bonner (Cover Art) ISBN-10 □ : □ 1914567218 ISBN-13 □ : □ 978-1914567216

*“We wanted to bring (the Rojava) revolution home through stories of both the epic and the mundane, through day to day moments in all of their messiness and poetry. In a world where earnestness is looked down on, this book is where we give ourselves permission to fall in love with a revolution. This book is a product of shared moments with hundreds of comrades, of tales hundreds of years old, of the novels we read as children, of militant struggles old and new, and of an ongoing conversation that’s happening right now. We didn’t start it and we certainly aren’t trying to finish it. But the more people contribute the richer we can build the future. This is what we are committed to be a part of.”*

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## **Scottish TUC President and Glasgow Councillor Roza Salih join European Civil Society call for EU to act for Öcalan**

After 28 months with no contact with Öcalan, and in the wake of claims about poison threats, representatives from European civil society gathered outside the European Parliament in Brussels last week to demand that the EU and other European institutions abide by the principles that they claim to stand by – of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – and put pressure on Turkey to comply with international law in their treatment of Abdullah Öcalan. They demanded, too, that he be given freedom and the opportunity to negotiate a peaceful solution to the Kurdish Question, and they spoke of his importance as a thinker and how his ideas have inspired their

own organisations. You can watch the whole event here:

After a welcome from Xanum Ayu from Rojava, the first speaker was Simon Dubbins, co-convenor of the Trade Union Freedom for Öcalan campaign in the UK, who demanded to know what is happening to Öcalan. He pointed out that no other prisoner is kept in such conditions and that Öcalan holds the key to peace.

Antonio Amoroso spoke on behalf of the CUB, the Confederazione Unitaria di Base, which is part of the Italian tradition of grassroots trade unionism. He explained that his union applies Öcalan's principles of democratic confederalism, and that these ideas could help the European institutions too.

Michela Arricale, an Italian human rights lawyer, demonstrated how passion can be combined with legal detail as she explained how the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) are ignoring a vital paragraph in their own rules when they claim that they can't divulge information on their visit to Öcalan's prison. The CPT are the only people outside the Turkish authorities to have visited İmralı prison since 2019.

Amedeo Ciaccheri is president of the Municipality of Rome VIII. He made clear that his message continued the tradition of support for Öcalan shown by the Italian people when Öcalan tried to claim asylum in Italy – though Ciaccheri himself was only young at that time. Italian cities, he explained, see the freedom of Abdullah Öcalan as their freedom.

(The organisers also received messages of support from the former mayor of Naples, where Öcalan was made an honorary citizen in 2016, and the mayor of Fossalto – also in Italy – where Öcalan was made an honorary citizen in 2020.)

Laura de Bonfils brought the support of her comrades in the ARCI – Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana, a million-member Italian cultural and social association – and the

ARCI's demand for respect for Öcalan's human rights.

Txente Rekondo spoke on behalf of the Basque trade union, LAB, Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak or Nationalist Workers' Committees. He stressed the importance of a strong leader in a peace process; and he stated that the Basque trade unions support freedom for Öcalan and for all Kurdish political prisoners, and call for the Kurds to be free to decide their own future.

**Mike Arnott is President of the Scottish Trade Union Congress, and brought solidarity from the Scottish trade union movement. He stressed that the people of Europe demand that the European Union stand with the oppressed and not with the oppressor.**

**Roza Salih came to Scotland as a refugee from Iraq when she was a child, and is now a councillor in Glasgow City Council. She spoke of Scotland's history of international solidarity – including giving an honorary life membership of Strathclyde University to Abdullah Öcalan, 'a leader and philosopher and great thinker'.**

Before a final word from Hakim Abdul Karim from Başur (the Kurdistan Region of Iraq), Jürgen Klute spoke as a former member of the European Parliament. He reminded the European Union of the need to increase pressure on the Turkish government to stop their war against the Kurds inside Turkey and beyond the border, to make peace with the Kurds, and to release Abdullah Öcalan.

Sarah Glynn, compering the event on behalf of the Permanent Vigil for Öcalan, observed that politicians are bombarded with different issues, but what had been discussed is a simple concrete campaign that can make a big difference.

(You can find the event briefing paper with a list of recommendations [here](#).)

Republished from Vigil for Öcalan:  
<https://ocalanvigil.net/2023/08/01/european-civil-society-tells-eu-to-act-for-ocalan/>

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## **Hope is shipwrecked: Erdogan's regime wins again**

After twenty years in power, writes *Uraz Aydin*, Recep Tayyip Erdogan won again in the second round of the presidential elections on 28 May 2023. Faced with his rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who won 47.84 per cent of the vote, Erdogan, whose bloc had also obtained a majority in parliament, was the winner with 52.16 per cent. Which means that the "Reis" should normally reign over an autocratic, fascist and Islamist regime for another five years.

## **The reactionary bloc wins the majority in parliament**

The bloc formed around Recep Tayyip Erdogan is probably one of the most reactionary coalitions in the country's political history. Already, since 2015, the AKP [*Erdogan's party*] had been in alliance with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). For this election Erdogan included in his bloc the Islamist party Yeniden Refah, led by Fatih Erbakan, son of the historic leader of political Islam in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan.

Another more Islamist wing of the far right, the Great Union Party (BBP) also forms part of Erdogan's camp. This bloc was also joined by HÜDA-PAR, the legal party of Hezbollah in Turkey, mainly established in the Kurdish region and which in the 1990s had been used as an armed force by the Turkish Gladio against the PKK [*Kurdish Workers Party*] and had committed numerous massacres. The regime will try to use this organization to break the hegemony of the Kurdish political movement, which has maintained itself despite a level of fierce repression since 2015.

During the legislative elections of 14 May, which were held at the same time as the first round of the presidential elections, the pro-Erdogan bloc obtained, with 49.4 per cent of the votes, 323 deputies (out of 600). Although his votes were down compared to the election of 2018 when he obtained 344 deputies, Erdogan still has the majority in parliament which allows him to adopt or prevent bills. The results obtained by the AKP were also down, but the MHP, which was estimated to have fallen to 6-7 per cent, almost regained its 2018 level, reaching 10 per cent. However it should be noted that the bloc came first in almost all the cities of the earthquake zone.

## **A defeat for the opposition**

Opposite this bloc was the Alliance of the Nation, whose main party is the Republican People's Party (CHP), a centre-left party whose origins lie in the foundation of the Republic. The other "big party" in this bloc is Meral Akşener's Good Party (İYİP), which is a far-right split, representing a more secular nationalism than the MHP, but trying to reposition itself towards the centre-right .

Also part of this alliance are two parties whose leaders were previously leaders of the AKP, one led by Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Prime Minister, and the other by Ali Babacan, former

Minister of Economy. Finally, the Saadet Partisi (SP), which comes from the historical current of Islamism from which the AKP emerged, also participates in this bloc, as well as another small right-wing party.

Politically, this opposition alliance defends a return to a parliamentary regime (abolished by Erdogan in 2017 following a referendum) and the recovery of the economy through a restored neoliberalism with certain “social” traits. With 35.4 per cent of the vote, the opposition bloc obtained 212 deputies, 23 more seats than in the previous election.

The parties of Babacan and Davutoğlu , as well as the SP, whose candidates were presented under the CHP lists, seem to have contributed 3 per cent to the results of the CHP. These right-wing parties thus obtain 40 seats, while they only brought in 22 more. The eligible places reserved for right-wing candidates in these lists had sparked debate among the rank and file of the CHP.

## **Nationalist turn of the opposition after the first round**

During the 14 May presidential election, despite all the opposition’s predictions, Erdogan won 49.5 per cent of the vote, thus beating the leader of the Alliance of the Nation by 5 points, the latter only receiving 44.8 per cent. Given the importance of the President of the Republic in the autocratic system, Kılıçdaroğlu’s victory was decisive for regime change. He led a campaign that was able to embrace large sectors of the population. The fact that he is an Alevi Kurd (a minority stream of Islam seen as a heresy by traditional Sunnism) had generated debate, with many believing that he could not unify the opposition. However, the leader of the CHP led a campaign proudly claiming his adhesion to Alevism and calling for a reconciliation of the population of Turkey in the face of the polarizing policies of Erdogan.

A third candidate, Sinan Ogan, an ultra-nationalist from the ranks of the MHP, won 5.2 per cent. He was the candidate of a small nationalist, anti-migrant and anti-Kurdish bloc, who refused to support Kilicdaroglu, in particular because the latter was also supported by the pro-Kurdish party HDP. He thus held a crucial position for the second round.

In order to be able to rally the electorate of Ogan , Kilicdaroglu, himself a candidate from a bloc made up of various centre-left, conservative, Islamist and far-right currents, thus operated a nationalist turn.

He argued that, in the context of a victory for Erdogan, 10 million new migrants would arrive in the country, that the cities would be under the control of refugees and the mafia, that young girls would no longer be able to walk around on their own, that violence against women was going to increase (because of the refugees) and that finally Erdogan was going to make concessions in the face of "terrorism" (therefore of the Kurdish movement). He was thus trying to ride the (massive, among Turks and Kurds) anti-migrant wave by declaring that he was going to send them all back to their own country, but also to reverse Erdogan's main argument during his campaign, that the opposition supposedly supported the "terrorism" of the PKK.

Indeed, the fact that the HDP (pro-Kurdish left) supported Kilicdaroglu, himself Kurd and Alevi, and that it promised to release Selahattin Demirtaş (former HDP leader, imprisoned for seven years) had been Erdogan's main angle of attack against the opposition. After having maintained a more democratic discourse before the first round, Kilicdaroglu ended up criticizing Erdogan himself for having conducted negotiations with the Kurdish movement (in 2009-2014).

Eventually Ogan preferred to express his support for Erdogan, but the most prominent party in the bloc for which Ogan had been a candidate, the Victory Party, whose main political

stance was anti-migrant nationalism, declared its support for Kilicdaroglu. On this, the latter signed a protocol with this party, where the anti-migrant position was reaffirmed but which also promised (within the framework of the laws) the continuation of the appointments of administrators in place of HDP mayors in the Kurdish region, who were accused of having links with the PKK (about fifty municipalities are concerned by this). While in the initial programme of the opposition it was a question of new elections for the town halls concerned... Although the HDP protested this decision, it continued to call to vote for Kilicdaroglu, but the percentage of participation in Kurdistan, which was already below Turkey's average in the first round, fell further in the second round. Despite everything, the opposition candidate emerged a winner in all the towns of the Kurdish region.

## **HDP, TIP and the “Work and Freedom” Alliance**

Another opposition alliance was the one called “Work and Freedom,” made up of the HDP (Democratic People's Party, left-wing party from the Kurdish movement), the TIP (Workers' Party of Turkey, in which our comrades of the [Fourth International](#) are active) as well as four other formations of the radical left. For the presidential elections this coalition supported Kılıçdaroğlu. For the presidential elections the HDP participated in the elections under the name of its “replacement party”, against the probability that it would be banned, the Green-Left Party (YSP).

The TIP did not present itself in the cities where the HDP had a large majority (Turkish Kurdistan) and in some where it risked losing deputies to the HDP and the CHP; it submitted slates in 52 out of 81 cities. The fact that the TIP wanted to run within the alliance but with independent slates in some cities is a question that has generated a lot of debate. For

the HDP, the TIP should have included its candidates in the lists of the YSP; its opinion was that having two competing lists within the same alliance would divide the votes and lose potential elected representatives.

The TIP had another proposal. The party had been observing an influx of members for several months. It had quadrupled its membership since mid-January, going from 10,000 to 40,000 members in four months, in particular because of its mobilization in solidarity with the city of Hatay (Antioch), seriously affected by the earthquake. This participation, but above all the sympathy that was expressed towards the party and its elected representatives, who for five years had led a very combative policy, came from political and social sectors that were largely different from those who had previously voted for the HDP. An important part came from the left of the CHP, but also from an electorate which previously voted for the right but which (especially through the elected representatives of the TIP) discovered a combative left, which does not mince its words vis-a-vis the ruling circles and gives a prominent place to workers' rights. It was clear that the TIP could not channel all of these votes to the HDP-YSP lists. So its proposal was that the alliance candidates present themselves in certain cities under the TIP lists (even if it meant putting HDP candidates at the top of the list) and thus having a plurality of candidacy tactics according to the demographic, ethnic and social specificities of the localities. This would have increased the results of the alliance at the national level, but also the number of elected representatives. In the end, the two parties failed to agree on this tactic, mismanaged the controversy (which had negative repercussions on the networks) and the TIP ended up presenting itself with its own lists in fifty cities. Among the TIP lists there were also candidates from two Trotskyist currents, the Workers' Democracy Party (IDP) and the International Workers' Solidarity Association (UID-DER).

The HDP-YSP obtained 8.8 per cent in the legislative elections, 3 per cent less than in the previous ones. It is still too early to make substantial analyses, but it seems that support for Kılıçdaroğlu for the presidential elections was understood as support for the CHP (in the legislative elections) and therefore votes went to this party. On the other hand, the 10 per cent barrier (to enter parliament) was an important source of motivation to vote for this party and allow its representation in parliament (and reduce that of the opposing bloc). The fact that this barrier is currently 7 per cent (a threshold that the HDP should easily exceed, according to estimates) must also have weighed, and part of the left-wing electorate who had previously voted for the HDP returned to vote for the CHP and partly for the TIP. Finally, we know that especially within the Kurdish people, certain more conservative and nationalist sectors are opposed to alliances with the Turkish far left; this must also have had an effect on the results.

The results of the YSP, which are considered a failure by the party, have triggered debates and in particular severe criticism from Selahattin Demirtaş, whose relationship with the leadership had been strained for several years. Having played an important role during the campaign from his cell (through the daily visits of his lawyers and his Twitter account directed from outside according to his instructions), Demirtaş has declared his retirement from "active politics". The HDP is thus embarking on a process of internal debates which will culminate in its next congress.

In this nightmarish panorama a meagre (but significant) consolation is the result that the TIP obtained. For the first time since 1965, a socialist party defending the cause of the working class has managed to enter parliament with its own votes (and not by being elected under the list of another party). The TIP obtained 1.7 per cent with a million votes, only presenting itself in two-thirds of the territory,

therefore probably above 2 per cent in total. It thus gained four deputies, three of whom were already in the previous parliament. The fourth, Can Atalay, who was elected as deputy for Hatay, is a renowned lawyer involved in all the struggles of the country and who has at present been in detention for a year and has been sentenced to 18 years in prison for having been one of the main spokespersons for the Gezi revolt in 2013. Can's case is being appealed; legally he should be able to be freed to take his place in parliament, but the regime refuses for the moment to release him.

## **Rebuilding class consciousness**

If the conditions for carrying out the campaigns were completely unequal (control of the media by Erdogan, etc.) and many cases of fraud were observed, we must recognize that the regime triumphed despite everything. Neither the economic crisis nor the earthquakes of February, and even less the attacks on democracy have led the conservative and popular electorate to break with the regime. On the contrary, the discontent of the working classes was expressed within the reactionary bloc, but towards currents even more radical than the AKP.

The results of these elections show once again that to defeat the Erdogan regime the defence of democratic and secular values is not enough. If Erdogan's camp brings together different social classes, so does the opposing bloc. Once again we see that the right wing of the opposition, far from being a solution, further strengthens the regime and the dominant bourgeois, nationalist and Islamist ideology. It is necessary to build another polarization, in order to break the reactionary hegemony, but also that of the opposition bloc. A polarization that would allow the dissociation between the interests of the working class, the oppressed and those of the bosses, whether secular or Islamist. The fight against authoritarianism must be invested with a social, class

content. And this goes through the reconstruction of the “subjective factor”, of class consciousness, of the capacity for self-organization of the exploited, of women against patriarchal domination, of the unification of local and migrant workers, Turkish, Kurdish, Syrians and Afghans. This is the main challenge facing the radical left, from the HDP to the TIP and other currents of the revolutionary left. Certainly the situation is not easy. We recognize our defeat, but we refuse to bend and give up the fight. Being aware of the fact that freedom and equality will only be the work of the workers themselves, as we like to repeat here, we pour ourselves a tea and get back to work...

1 June 2023

*Uraz Aydin is the editor of Yeniyol, the review of the Turkish section of the [Fourth International](#), and one of many academics dismissed for having signed a petition in favour of peace with the Kurdish people, in the context of the state of emergency decreed after the attempted coup in 2016.*

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## **Earthquake hits Kurdish regions in Turkiye/Syria**

The earthquake that hit parts of the Turkish and Syrian states on Monday is a tragic disaster for millions of people in the region, *writes Mike Picken*. Tens of thousands are already known to have died and the scale of human disaster is unfolding every hour.

Many of the worst affected populations are in towns, cities and villages with large Kurdish populations. Aid is being mobilised by states and governments around the world, but there is a big issue about the Turkish state government and the officially recognised Syrian state governments being used to coordinate emergency support.

The Turkish government of President Erdogan has sought to repress its Kurdish population for decades and with an election originally scheduled for May has increasingly been attempting political attacks and bans on Kurdish-supporting parties and taking military action in Kurdish areas, including invading and attacking Kurdish communities within the neighbouring states of Iraq and Syria prior to the earthquake. The declaration of a state of emergency gives the Turkish state massive military powers in the affected regions (the Turkish state has the second largest army in NATO after the USA).

The Syrian dictatorship of Assad, backed by the Russian state, has waged a brutal war for a decade with the help of Russian forces against all opposition to the despotic regime, including the Kurdish liberated zone of [Rojava](#) that stands as a beacon of hope.

The Turkish state also has an appalling record of mismanagement of funds for emergencies and is now apparently blocking independent aid entering Turkey. The progressive Turkish party, the pro-Kurdish HDP under threat of being banned, has issued a briefing to Members of the European Parliament that we are publishing below that warns of the role of the Turkish government and the steps European powers need to take to ensure aid goes to those who need it.

Kurdish fighters were the key element of the resistance to Daesh/ISIS in the region in recent years, but the progressive Kurdish movement is under attack by governments around the world who accept the Turkish and Syrian states' repressive

behaviours.

# Aid must be independent of the Turkish and Syrian states

The Kurdish community in the region cannot rely on the Turkish or Syrian states to come to their aid in this disaster. It is therefore urging that solidarity and aid pass through appropriate NGO bodies, particularly Heyva Sor (the Kurdish 'Red Crescent/Moon' humanitarian group). Getting funds to Heyva Sor, which is repressed by the Turkish state, is difficult. We don't yet know whether the Disasters Emergency Committee of 14 UK charities is prepared to work with independent Kurdish organisations or whether it will accept the veto of the Turkish state.

So, we are therefore calling for fundraising efforts in Scotland and the rest of Britain to support the efforts of the London-based registered charity the Refugee and Workers Cultural Association which has launched an appeal for fundraising via gofundme as the quickest way of getting monies to support Kurdish and other communities on the ground. It is also possible to donate from the UK directly to Heyva Sor via its German account. Links for both these appeals are below.

The main organisations in Britain coordinating solidarity and aid in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake are [Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan](#) and the [Kurdistan Solidarity Network](#) covering England and Wales. We urge readers to support these two organisations. You can also follow developments on the independent news channel [MedyaNews](#). We also publish below the statement of the **Workers Party of Turkey** on the disaster (Workers Party of Turkey is a left wing extra-parliamentary party [supported by members of the Fourth International in Turkey](#)).

# **Supporting victims of devastating Earthquake**

*FERHAT AKGUL is organising this fundraiser on behalf of REFUGEE WORKERS' CULTURAL ASSOCIATION.*

*At Gik-Der we are dismayed and heartbroken to hear of the terrible earthquakes that have affected various cities in Turkey, in which thousands of people have tragically lost their lives. Many of our members and wider community in the UK are from areas where the devastation has been worst, and we note with a solemn heart that relatives and those dear to us are among those who have been killed. As we come to terms with this grief and loss, we are equally outraged at the government's failure to act with any degree of care and decisiveness in preparation for such events, despite continued warnings from the community. Natural disasters like this are not simply acts of God – the devastation and destruction, the loss of life and limb, are unforgivable failures of a state which places no value on lives.*

*The first and most important foundation for any such struggle is solidarity, and for this reason, we are immediately starting a campaign to fundraise for relief for those effected by this tragedy.*

*Funds will be sent directly to organisations working on the ground to support the victims.*

*Update by FERHAT AKGUL, Organiser*

*Donations are reaching out to those effected. Teams we work with our working tirelessly day and night supporting the victims of the earthquake, even clearing snowy roads to reach the aid to those in need.*

*GOFUNDME Appeal by Refugee and Workers Cultural Association*  
<https://gofund.me/f9db8b43>

# **HDP Briefing to Members of the European Parliament**

*Instead of monopolising aid, which given the Erdoğan government's track record of financial mismanagement will simply generate more chaos and bureaucracy, we recommend the following seven-point plan to Brussels:*

*The European Parliament and the EEAS should, through resolutions, delegations and diplomatic notes, call on the Turkish government to allow all civil society and political actors to participate in humanitarian relief efforts without facing politically-motivated obstruction;*

*The member states of the European Council should establish and facilitate a joint crisis and recovery group to coordinate relief and rescue operations. The group should include Turkish state and civil society actors such as HD, TTB, KESK, DISK and Egitim-Sen, as well as international institutions.*

*Grants made to the Turkish state in the context of the crisis should be subject to constant scrutiny to prevent nepotism, embezzlement, and misuse of aid funds.*

*It should be made easier for aid organised by European charitable initiatives or smaller aid organisations to cross Turkey's borders.*

*On 8 February, President Erdoğan declared a three-month state of emergency in ten provinces affected by the earthquake. The government is seeking parliamentary approval for this unprecedented measure. This is unnecessary and will most likely serve to further weaken the opposition in the country, which already faces liquidation in the form of ongoing legal*

*efforts to ban the HDP. The EU and international organisations, should strongly emphasise that it is not necessary to declare a state of emergency and concomitant rule of law, while pointing out that this difficult transition can be managed through alternative legislative mechanisms.*

*In addition to the political and humanitarian crisis resulting from ten years of war, Syria has suffered major damage in the recent earthquake. Due to Damascus' obstruction of aid to opposition-held areas, the main routes for aid to enter Syria are via neighboring states. Therefore, it is recommended that all border crossings to Syria be opened so that humanitarian aid can also reach Syria via neighboring states, reaching all regions of Syria including those out of Syrian Government control.*

*The consequences of this earthquake are long-reaching in nature. Millions of people are affected, not only because of the earthquake, but more generally because Turkish society is in a severe economic crisis. Therefore, longer-term support is needed to help people rebuild their communities and homes. Planning longer-term reconstruction assistance for Turkey should be an crucial issue for the EU and international institutions not only in the present crisis, but also in the months and years ahead.*

*If you have any further questions about the situation after the earthquake in Turkey or Syria, please do not hesitate to contact the crisis coordination office of the HDP*

## ***Earthquake Appeal – Kurdistan Solidarity Network (England/Wales)***

*Thousands in Turkey and Syria are still trapped from the earthquake and are sending messages to loved ones from under*

*the rubble. The region affected is largely Kurdish. Please donate to Heyva Sor (the Kurdish Red Crescent). They are the main Kurdish charity on the ground carrying out rescue operations right now.*

*“Today, 6 February, an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 occurred in the Pazarcik district of Maraş city in Northern Kurdistan. After that, there was a second earthquake with a magnitude of 6.4 in Nurdagi district of Dilok and a third earthquake with a magnitude of 6.5 in Islahiye district of Dilok.*

*These strong earthquakes mainly affected the cities of Amed, Malatya, Urfa, Semsur, Dilok and many other areas in northern Kurdistan, the cities of Adana, Hatay, Kilis, Osmaniye and Kayseri in Turkey, and the areas of Cizre, Euphrates and Shehba in northern and eastern Syria. The earthquake also affected the surrounding countries. As a result of the earthquake, hundreds of citizens have lost their lives and thousands are injured. Thousands of people are still under the rubble. Many houses and buildings have been destroyed, with winter conditions making rescue operations difficult.” – Heyva Sor*

*More from Heyva Sor and a link to a Direct Paypal donation, or the bank transfer details to their European branch in Germany:*

<https://www.heyvasor.com/en/banga-alikariya-lezgin-ji-bo-mexduren-erdheje/>

*The Direct Paypal donate button link:*

[https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted\\_button\\_id=ST5BWWFB7FPGS](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=ST5BWWFB7FPGS)

*As of today, Monday 7th, the day after the earthquakes the death toll has reached 6,000 with the search for survivors ongoing. With at least 8,000 people rescued from debris in Turkey with 380,000 taking refuge in shelters.*

Please donate what you can to the ongoing rescue efforts, and share this appeal as wide as you can.

Thank you.

Published by Kurdistan Solidarity Network 7 February 2023  
<https://kurdistansolidarity.net/2023/02/07/earthquake-appeal/>

**“Our country does not deserve this cruelty – we stand in solidarity with our people with all our strength”**

*Statement by the Workers Party of Turkey*

*Upon receiving the news of the earthquake that shook our country this morning, we in the Workers’ Party of Turkey took immediate action, and rapidly established a Disaster Coordination Center. Since then, we reached out to many compatriots in the earthquake zone and coordinated humanitarian aid coming from citizens in other provinces.*

*So far, the TIP Disaster Coordination Center has received more than 1500 calls for help. The number of calls reveal the severity of the situation we are facing.*

*– > In many neighborhoods of the Hatay province, especially in Defne and Samandağ, as well as in provinces Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep and Adıyaman, people have been left to their fate in the harsh winter conditions.*

*– > In these areas, many buildings, old and new, subcontracted via state tenders under the AKP government - public institutions such as hospitals, dormitories, hotels,*

*AFAD and municipality buildings- collapsed. The pro-government construction companies, and the ministries and directorates which awarded these tenders to them are responsible for the death of the young, the children, and the patients. We demand the prosecution of those who caused the death and suffering of thousands of citizens.*

*- > Against all the protests of Hatay residents, experts, and environmental activists, Hatay Airport was built on the Amik Plain, and is now unusable. With the cities' highways and viaducts damaged, it is now impossible to reach Hatay, and tens of thousands of people cannot receive aid.*

*- > Institutions such as the Turkish Armed Forces and AFAD are tasked with search and rescue and providing food during emergencies. However, under the AKP rule, they have been systematically disempowered, their staff and personnel reduced, and thus they have been rendered useless in search and rescue operations. Besides, many specialized, volunteer search and rescue groups were not allowed to get involved because they couldn't get the necessary certification issued by the pro-AKP bureaucracy.*

*- > In the aftermath of the massive earthquake of 17 August 1999 in northwestern Turkey almost 25 years ago, the "earthquake taxes" collected nationwide were not spent on preparing for earthquakes and ensuring the safety of the citizens, but on roads and bridges that the AKP has built in order to generate political gains and enrich pro-government contractors.*

*- > Our country was hit by two very severe earthquakes during the coldest days of winter. Effective search and rescue in the earthquake region, especially in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş and Adıyaman, is virtually impossible. Besides, there is a lack of food and water supply. Our citizens are trying to rescue their relatives from the rubble by digging with their hands, while those who survived struggle in the freezing cold.*

– > *Our country has been facing a great challenge for hours since the two devastating earthquakes. But the state, the government institutions, specialized experts, means for transportation and sustenance are nowhere to be seen.*

*The people of our country do not deserve to be abandoned to such despair, nor do they deserve the remorselessness of the government.*

*We will never forget and never forgive those who abandoned our people to this fate.*

*We have mobilized with all our power to stand with our fellow citizens who have been left to fend for themselves in these harsh winter conditions.*

*Our people will heal their wounds through solidarity.*

*Our fellow citizens will never be alone and helpless.*

*7 February 2023*

*Published by International Viewpoint:  
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7979>*

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## **Earthquake in Turkey: the state versus the people**

What do you do when you are thousands of miles from your family, writes [Sarah Glynn](#) on [Bella Caledonia](#), and their phone stops ringing and you don't know if they are lacking a signal or buried under rubble? This is the situation facing very many

diaspora families with roots in the extensive region devastated by Monday morning's earthquake. Ugur Cagritekin, from Edinburgh's Kurdish community, told me that around a dozen of his close friends had already flown back to Turkey to try and find their relatives. Many members of his sister in law's family are beneath the ruins.

Those remaining in Scotland, and in other parts of the Kurdish and Turkish diaspora, are working frantically to try and organise aid deliveries to the worst affected regions. Besides damaged roads and severe winter weather, this task is made much more difficult by the Turkish authorities who insist that all aid must be delivered through AFAD, the government's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority. AFAD has been shown to be woefully inadequate for the task it faces, and there are also well-founded concerns over its priorities. Government bodies are known to favour government supporters, and there is no confidence that AFAD will distribute aid where it is most needed. Rather than allow the evolution of local support networks, this top-down approach is designed to make people dependent on, and grateful to, President Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). A record of government corruption makes many wary that aid distribution will be co-opted to boost the image of the government.

Hatice (not her real name), another Edinburgh resident, told me that she has been working with contacts in Turkey to try and organise the delivery of essential equipment that can help some of the hundreds of thousands of people who have had to leave their homes and are struggling to survive in the bitter cold. They are looking for vehicles that can travel through the snow, and for routes where they can avoid having their supplies confiscated by AFAD. Hatice, in common with a very high proportion of Edinburgh's Kurds, hales from Elbistan. Their hometown, which was very close to the epicentre of the second earthquake that followed eight hours after the first one, has suffered severe damage. Buildings that had cracked

with the first quake were brought down completely by the second. Hatice's mother-in-law is lost in her collapsed home, as are many of her cousins and friends.

Monday's earthquakes have devastated ten Turkish provinces that are home to around thirteen million people: well over twice the population of Scotland. They have also caused massive destruction in Syria, especially in government-controlled areas and areas controlled by Turkey (including occupied Afrîn). Autonomous North and East Syria is less badly affected, and their Syrian Democratic forces have offered to provide help to all other parts of Syria – however I only have space to look at Turkey here. The scale of the disaster is terrifying. Thousands are already confirmed dead, but with so many more trapped in the destroyed buildings, and the vast majority of these buildings yet to see any rescue equipment, the number is expected to rise into the tens of thousands. Some fear the final figure may be over 100,000.

Three days after the initial earthquake, which caught people asleep in their beds, many places, and especially smaller towns and villages, have yet to see any sign of official help. Local people are trying to remove the rubble that is burying their families and neighbours with their bare hands, but without the equipment to cut and lift concrete this is often impossible. Chances of survival in the sub-zero temperatures are eking away with every passing minute.

Even for those who have escaped the initial destruction, conditions are extremely difficult. The risks from the many aftershocks, as well as dangerous structural damage, makes it unsafe for people to stay in their homes, but AFAD has done very little to supply them with the basic shelter, warmth, and sustenance that they need to survive. Many places are without water and electricity. Checking that surviving buildings are safe for people to return to will be a massive task in itself.

Social media is full of desperate pleas for help, and anger at

the absence of the authorities that should be providing it. The response from the government has been to clamp down on people sharing news of what is happening. In an angry television message on Tuesday, President Erdoğan announced a State of Emergency in the affected provinces. The main effect of this, like the national emergency following the 2016 coup attempt, will be to allow much greater government control and suppression of criticism. Erdoğan told viewers that he is keeping a note of all the 'lies and distortions' and will open his notebook 'when the time comes'. Already, twitter has been restricted – although it was being used to provide vital information for search and rescue. Journalists have been detained while reporting from the rubble in Diyarbakir, and investigations are being opened against TV commentators and social media users.

The one organisation that has the equipment, skills, and competence to make a serious impact on the rescue efforts, the Turkish army, remains in readiness to invade Syria, but only a relatively small force has been deputed to help the rescue operation.

Prospects are grim and hopes are fading for the tens of thousands still buried.

## **A natural disaster in a political context**

Before looking at the huge mobilisation by local people in Turkey, and at what people in Scotland can do to help, I want to examine the political context that has massively amplified the horror of this natural disaster. Of course, the focus must be on humanity, but we do need to understand the politics that makes humanity so difficult to achieve, and the political forces that are seeking to exploit the situation for their own, very inhumane, ends.

This natural disaster has taken place in the context of a lethal cocktail of ruthless neoliberal crony capitalism, political corruption, anti-Kurdish racism (which has left infrastructure underdeveloped and attacked political and civic organisation), and an increasingly dictatorial authoritarian regime that will not work with others and will not broach criticism.

Across the affected region, blocks of flats have collapsed like houses of cards. Much of Turkey's recent economic development was based on a building boom, with contracts awarded to government supporters. Turkey is crossed by major geological fault lines, but in the rush for profits, there was no room for such niceties as observing earthquake design regulations. As a friend who works in disaster planning put it to me, you can have a lot of good regulations and codes, but 'the snag is in the governance' and politicians feel that enforcing regulations is not a vote-winning priority and that nothing will happen on their watch.

The neglect of earthquake preparedness has come from the top. After the 1999 Istanbul earthquake, the government of the time brought in what was commonly known as the 'Earthquake Tax', which was supposed to pay for disaster preparation. This is estimated to have brought in £3.8 billion pounds, but there is no evidence that this has been spent on making anything safer.

It was not as if the government had lacked warnings. The Chairman of the Chamber of Geological Engineers has stated that they had not only expected an earthquake of this kind but had also submitted a report to the president and government on what should be done in preparation, which had received no response. He described the policies of uncontrolled development as 'rent and plunder'.

Despite the palpable and massive failure of the government's disaster response, Erdoğan shows no sense of responsibility, let alone contrition. On Wednesday, when he finally visited

Maraş, at the centre of the first earthquake, he told a survivor, 'The damage is done. These things are part of destiny's plan.'

We have seen plenty of evidence of this disregard of safety planning before – notably in the lack of vital planes to fight 2021's forest fires, when, too, Erdoğan seemed more concerned to stamp out negative publicity than extinguish the flames; and also in the mining disasters at Soma in 2014 and Bartın last October, when warnings of dangerous conditions were not heeded, and Erdoğan also provoked anger by putting the blame on 'destiny'.

The abject inadequacy of both preparedness and response has not spared any of the cities hit, whatever their ethnic makeup or political leanings, but it is also significant that the predominantly Kurdish southeast of Turkey, where much of the damage occurred, has been purposefully left behind in infrastructural development by successive governments. And, in the places where the population voted for the pro-Kurdish leftist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), they have had their elected mayors removed – and often imprisoned – and civic structures that the mayors supported closed down.

When people most need to work together and combine resources, Erdoğan is terrified of allowing any involvement from other political parties in case it earns them support. Again, this is not a new phenomenon. The central government confiscated aid for Covid victims collected by the Peoples' Republican Party (CHP) mayors of Istanbul and Ankara. An openly HDP delivery of aid to the earthquake areas was seized by the government.

Faced with a disaster of this scale and a response organisation that is clearly unable to cope, most people would have expected the government to turn to the military – the second biggest army in NATO: all the more so as Erdoğan is looking for a popular victory, and what could be more

universally popular than an effective response to a major disaster? That he has opted for only a very limited deployment may also be a consequence of his fear of being upstaged. Despite major purges, many in the army do not endorse his turn against Turkish secularism.

The dreadful failures in the government response can also be seen as a product of the arrogance of dictatorship, where one man cannot oversee everything, but others are afraid to criticise: the emperor's new clothes syndrome.

Erdoğan's desperation to hold onto power at all costs makes him prioritise perception over reality. The Turkish government has increasingly resorted to stifling freedom of speech, and last year's Disinformation Law has been widely condemned as a vehicle for censorship and the criminalisation of journalism. Although making political predictions for Turkey has become even more difficult, many must be worrying that if he sees his support falling, Erdoğan might use the emergency situation to postpone the forthcoming election.

The scale of the Turkish Governments failures and of their impacts is staggering, but in trying to understand what could have gone so wrong, I found myself thinking of the Grenfell fire. Turkey's disaster may be a thousand times bigger, but there are many similarities in the underlying forces and in the attempt to manage perceptions rather than face responsibility.

Inevitably, the lack of effective response – and in many places any response at all – has produced a swell of anger, especially among those who have waited in vain for help to rescue family members trapped beneath the debris. On Wednesday in Adiyaman, where no help had arrived more than two days after the earthquake, the Minister of Transport, and the local governor fled in their cars rather than face the angry crowd. The AKP mayor of Kirikhan has damned his party's government in front of the collapsed building that buried his children.

There is a new axiom being shared round Turkey: It is not earthquakes that kill people, it is states that kill people.

## **Solidarity from the grassroots**

In contrast to the state's failures, organisations across Turkey have sprung into action, from political parties to community groups. Cars and trucks are bringing aid supplies from all over the country, organised by local groups or even private individuals.

The big municipalities run by the main opposition Republican People's Party have been coordinating large collections and deliveries of basic aid, with the CHP leader announcing that they will not accept bureaucratic obstacles even if they 'have to be arrested for finding bread and blankets'. And the HDP, which has fewer financial resources and has been deprived of municipal power, is also managing to get deliveries through despite government obstruction. (The scale of the relief effort is going to make government control increasingly difficult to implement.) 93 trucks of supplies organised by the HDP had reached the earthquake area by Wednesday morning, and Ugur Cagritekin told me that they had received news that five trucks had reached Elbistan where supplies were being delivered to people in need through the coordination of the HDP and the local Alevi centre. They want to take aid to villages as well as the town centre. Some people in the villages have moved from their homes into the relative safety of their more lightly constructed stables, where they can also benefit from the warmth of the animals, but there has been no help from outside.

The HDP's strength lies in its ability to mobilise and organise its large network of supporters and sympathisers and like-minded community organisations. As soon as they heard about the earthquake, the party dropped all other plans, set up a central coordination centre, and dispatched leading

members to the affected area. Local election centres were transformed into coordination centres, while the youth organisation concentrated on rescue work. They put out calls for solidarity and for people with shelter and food to share with those without, and they helped create a framework to allow people's natural solidarity to find direction.

I spoke with a volunteer at Rosa Women's Association in Diyarbakir as she took a break from preparing soup and tea for 200 people taking shelter from the dangers of damaged buildings. She told me that their city (the unofficial capital of Turkish Kurdistan) benefitted from being left wing and thus easy to organise. Even in relatively accessible Diyarbakir, where the devastation is patchy, official relief efforts are seriously inadequate; however, although the HDP mayor and council have been removed (and the mayor imprisoned), HDP organisation remains extremely strong.

Their earthquake relief coordination is the HDP's philosophy of grassroots organisation and control put into action. When Ertuğrul Kürkçü, the HDP's honorary president, writes about 'transforming earthquake solidarity into a social movement', he is not talking about an abstract idea but a political practice.

Kurdish communities outside Turkey have wanted to send essential supplies too, but there are reports of deliveries being turned back for lack of documentation, or being taken over by AFAD at the border. The consensus, across the Kurdish diaspora, is to call for financial donations to the Kurdish Red Crescent, Hevya Sor, which operates throughout the affected areas – and of course helps everyone regardless of background. Hevya Sor have the contacts on the ground that enable them to get the aid through to where it is needed, independent of government meddling. So far, this fundraising has been focused on Kurdish communities, but the many other people who want to help and are uncertain who to trust, should be reassured that this is an organisation supported by those

with most reason to be concerned.

To donate in from the UK please send to Hevya Sor's German bank account or donate via Paypal:

Account details:

IBAN: DE49 3705 0299 0004 0104 81

BIC/SWIFT: COKSDE33XXX

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# **Iran: Support for the “Woman, Life, Freedom” Uprising – No to Executions ! (Solidarity statement)**

*This solidarity appeal and the initial signatories, that include members of the French National Assembly and the European Parliament, was originally published on 20 January 2023, in French, on the independent website [Mediapart](https://mediapart.fr) (mediapart.fr). This English translation is republished from [‘Europe Solidaire San Frontières’ \(ESSF – Europe Solidarity](#)*

[Without Frontiers](#), an association for international solidarity):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65392> It is also available in PDF form in [English](#), [French](#), [Kurdish](#), [Persian](#), [German](#), [Spanish](#) and [Italian](#) languages ([links also here](#)).

Signatories are still sought – contact [info@ecosocialist.scot](mailto:info@ecosocialist.scot) for how to sign.

## **Iran: Support for the “Woman, Life, Freedom” Uprising – No to Executions !**

Since the murder of Jina-Mahsa Amini on September 16 by the morality police, a popular uprising unprecedented in its scope, depth and duration has shaken the Islamic Republic of Iran. In less than 48 hours, the slogan “Woman, Life, Freedom” spread throughout the country, then around the world.

## **The fight for the fall of the Islamic Republic is on**

Soon other slogans flourished: “Death to the dictator”, “Death to the oppressor, be it the Shah or the Supreme Guide”, “Bread, Work, Freedom”, “Poverty, corruption, high cost of living, we will go until the overthrow”.

This radical protest movement brings together women, young people, national minorities, workers with or without jobs, in a total rejection of this theocratic, misogynistic and totally corrupt regime. The uprising is anchored in the long term and affects more than 160 small and large cities. With more than 50% of the population below the poverty line and the absence of elementary democratic and social rights, it is the whole

system that the people of Iran want to overthrow.

Calls for strikes are increasing, especially among university teachers, workers in petrochemicals, steelworks in Isfahan, public transport in Tehran and its suburbs, truck drivers... The strikers suffer dismissals , arrests and torture.

## **Fierce and unlimited repression**

To date, the repression has caused more than 500 deaths, including 69 minors, thousands of injuries, more than 19,000 prisoners and missing persons, kidnappings. In Iranian Kurdistan and Sistan Balochistan, the Revolutionary Guards are waging a bloody war against the rebellious population. Kurdish towns are undergoing a state of siege that does not say its name.

The violence of this criminal regime knows no bounds. Numerous testimonies attest to the incredible brutality of the conditions of detention aimed at breaking the determination of the detainees. Of the prisoners are tortured, raped, beaten to death.

In order to create a climate of terror and put an end to protest, the judiciary pronounces increasingly heavy sentences against demonstrators. Despite this, the mobilization does not weaken. With courage and determination, students, young people, women, workers, artists and journalists continue to challenge the regime, and it has decided to take it a step further.

## **The proliferation of death sentences**

For the simple fact of having demonstrated, at least 65 people (including 11 women and five children) have been charged with "enmity with God", "corruption on Earth", insurrection or murder. The judiciary connects parodies of trials, without any right of defense and multiplies death sentences.

After the executions of Mohsen Shekari and Majidreza Rahnavard on December 8 and 12, the Iranian authorities proceeded, on January 7, to hang Seyed Mohammad Hosseini and Mohammad Mehdi Karami. Their crimes: having dared to express their revolt in the face of the death of Jina-Mahsa Amini in Tehran or of Hadis Nadjafi in Karaj. The worst is to be feared for those who wait on the death row of Iran's sordid prisons and more broadly for all prisoners.

## **The people of Iran must be masters of their destiny**

In this context and faced with the spectre of a political and social revolution in Iran, the leaders of the great powers are working, more or less discreetly, for the constitution of a Transitional Council, bringing together all the currents of the opposition of the Iranian right, including the monarchists. These currents, liberal on the economic level and authoritarian on the political level, are the opposite of the dynamics of the mobilizations and the social and democratic aspirations which are expressed in Iran.

From the 1953 coup organized by the CIA and the British secret services against the Mossadegh government and its policy of nationalizing oil, to the Guadeloupe conference in 1979 where the heads of state of France, Germany, of the United Kingdom and the United States accelerated the Shah's departure into exile and decided on his replacement by Khomeini, the great powers have always acted, unsurprisingly, in favor of their own interests against those of the peoples of Iran.

Contrary to the solutions imposed from outside, we defend a real campaign of international solidarity with all those who are mobilizing in Iran to put an end to the Islamic Republic.

# **To live up to the determination and courage of the Iranian people**

The outcome of the current uprising will be decisive for the peoples of the region and the world. It is therefore our responsibility, within our means, to help the “Woman, Life, Freedom” uprising achieve its emancipatory aspirations.

Indeed, the repressive machine that is the Islamic Republic will not be broken without a powerful international campaign and without a strong mobilization of world opinion.

- We demand an immediate end to death sentences, executions and the abolition of capital punishment.
- We demand the immediate release of all imprisoned political and trade union prisoners, teachers, students, doctors, artists, activists and demonstrators, etc.
- We demand the establishment of an international committee made up of jurists, trade unionists, journalists and NGOs to carry out an independent investigation into places of detention in Iran.
- We support women’s fight for the right to control their bodies. We demand with them the abolition of all misogynistic laws as well as gender apartheid.
- We support the fundamental and democratic rights of Iranian men and women, whether they are Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs, Azeris, Lors, or Persians.
- We support the workers of Iran in their struggle for dignity, their rights to defend themselves through strike action and the building of trade unions and political organizations.
- We strongly demand from France and Europe the freezing of the assets of the highest leaders of the Revolutionary Guards

and the Islamic Republic, including those of the Guide Ali Khamenei and his entourage, the total amount of which is estimated at \$95 billion. These fortunes acquired through the plunder of resources, the overexploitation of workers, predation and corruption must return to the peoples of Iran.

- Like what was done against the Russian oligarchs, we demand the freezing of the assets of the Iranian oligarchs.
- We demand the lifting of banking and commercial secrecy in France, in Europe and in the world to block the wealth accumulated by the leaders of the Islamic Republic, the Revolutionary Guards and the companies linked to them.
- We demand the cessation of all industrial, economic and diplomatic collaboration with the Islamic Republic.

As signatories to this platform, we reaffirm our full and complete support for all those who fight in Iran for equality, social justice, democracy and against all forms of autocratic and authoritarian power.

We are at their side by all the means at our disposal, and we are committed to multiplying initiatives of solidarity with the peoples of Iran. Until the victory of this irrepressible revolutionary momentum!

Signatures:

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121. Silvia Fernandes MICHELI, teacher (Uruguay)
122. Anwar MIR SATTARI, ecologist (Belgium)
123. Mathilde MONNIER, choreographer (France) 124.
- 124 – Robi MORDER, lawyer and political scientist (France)
- 125) Manuel AGUILA MORA, historian, autonomous university of Mexico (Mexico)
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- 150 – Philippe POUTOU, spokesman of the NPA (France)
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- 167 Janick SCHAUFELBUEHL, Associate Professor Faculty of Social and Political Sciences University of Lausanne (Switzerland)
168. Marc SCHLESSER, Décroissance Alternative (Switzerland)
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- 170 – Yasmine SIBLOT, sociologist (France)
- 171 Cécile SILHOUETTE, Ensemble ! (France)
172. Francis SITEL, Animation team of Ensemble! (France)
173. Omar SLAOUTI, teacher, anti-racist activist, elected in Argenteuil (France)
174. Alda SOUSA, mathematician, University of Porto (Portugal)
175. Claude STAZAN, CEDETIM (France)
- 176 Isabelle STENGERS, philosopher (Belgium)
177. Quentin TALON, mathematician, town councilor in Montreux (Switzerland)
178. Daniel TANURO, ecosocialist author (Belgium)
179. Imad TEMIZA, secretary of the Palestinian Postal Service Workers Union (Palestine)
180. Benoît TESTE, secretary general of the FSU (France)
181. Julien THERY, historian at the University Louis Lumière Lyon 2 and president of the Media (France)
182. João TEIXERA LOPES, sociologist, University of Porto (Portugal)
183. Sylvie TISSOT, sociologist (France)
184. Marc TOMCZAK, teacher researcher at the University of Lorraine (France)
185. Pascal TORRE, deputy head of the international sector of the PCF (France)
186. Éric TOUSSAINT, political scientist, Universities of Liège and Paris 8, member of the International Council of the World Social Forum (Belgium)
187. Enzo TRAVERSO, historian
188. Josette TRAT, academic, feminist activist (France)
189. Stéphanie TREILLET, economist, Ensemble ! (France)

190. Anne TRISTAN (France)
191. Aurélie TROUVÉ, Member of Parliament for Seine-Saint-Denis (France)
192. Franco TURIGLIATTO, former Senator (Italy)
193. Charles-André UDRY, economist and director of the website Alencontre (Switzerland)
194. Mario UNDA, sociologist (Ecuador)
195. Miguel URBAN, MEP (Spanish State)
196. Roseline VACHETTA, former MEP – NPA (France)
197. Eleni VARIKAS, professor emeritus at the University of Paris 8 (France)
198. Christiane VOLLAIRE, Philosopher (France)
199. Léo WALTER Deputy of Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, parliamentary group LFI-NUPES (France)
200. Thomas WEYTS, SAP – Anticapitalist, (Belgium)
201. Youlie YAMAMOTO, spokesperson of ATTAC (France)
202. Erika DEUBER ZIEGLER, art historian (Switzerland)
203. Jean ZIEGLER, sociologist, internationalist, politician (Switzerland)

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**Protestors demand justice for  
assassinated Kurdish  
activists on streets of Paris  
– interview with Sarah Glynn,**

# Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan

*On 7 January 2023, 25,000 marched through the streets of Paris to demand justice for assassinated Kurdish activists, writes Mike Picken. The event was initially to commemorate the anniversary of three murders of Kurdish activists in Paris' 10th arrondissement by a Turkish state agent in 2013 but was overshadowed by the assassination of three more Kurdish activists on 23 December 2022 in front of the Kurdish Democratic Center (CDKF) on rue d'Enghien in the same arrondissement. In both assassinations the French state of President Macron has failed to satisfy Kurdish demands for the links with the Turkish state to be exposed and to classify the recent murders as terrorism.*

*The mass demonstration was supported by the left parties in France and there is a report from Mireille Court of the march in [l'Anticapitaliste](#), weekly paper of the NPA (Nouvelle Parti Anticapitaliste) issue 644, [here \(in French\)](#).*

*Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan (SSK) activist **Sarah Glynn** was also on the march in Paris, and below we republish an interview with her, taken from the Australian ecosocialist [Green Left](#) together with pictures by Sarah. Sarah Glynn also writes a weekly column on the Kurdish struggle on [Medyanews](#) that we encourage our readers to follow.*

*Events in Scotland in Solidarity with Kurdistan can be found on the Facebook page of SSK here: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/ScottishSolidaritywithKurdistan/> .*

*The Centre for Kurdish Progress is hosting Newroz celebrations in **Edinburgh** on **Wednesday 8th March 2023**, with leading figures from the Kurdish Community, joined by Members of the Scottish Parliament from SNP, Labour and Scottish Greens (Tickets*

available [here](#))

# France: 25,000 march in Paris to demand justice for assassinated Kurdish activists



Kurdish protest in Paris on January 7. Photo: Sarah Glynn

A [large march](#) took place in Paris, on January 7, to demand justice for three Kurdish female activists – including Sakine Cansız, a co-founders of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) – were assassinated by a Turkish gunman in that city 10 years ago. The French government has withheld documents that could prove that the Turkish state was responsible by classifying them “top secret”.

Protests have been held every year to mark this atrocity, but this year’s action was supercharged with anger at another assassination of three Kurdish activists in Paris on December 23. *Green Left*’s **Peter Boyle** spoke to Kurdish solidarity activist and writer **Sarah Glynn** who participated in the march.

**What do you estimate were the numbers at the march and what were the main groups participating?**

The organisers estimated an attendance of 25,000. Most were Kurds, and Kurdish organisations had organised buses from different parts of Europe. There were also trade unionists, and representatives from the different left parties, and sympathetic organisations and individuals.

The march started from opposite the Gard du Nord, near 147 rue la Fayette where the three Kurdish women were assassinated ten years ago, and many people took the opportunity, before it set off, to visit the community centre where the three Kurds were assassinated in December. Both places, in Paris's 10th Arrondissement, were marked by portraits and flowers.

Among the sea of Kurdish flags and placards, there was a sprinkling of trade union flags, and the Union Syndicale Solidaires marched behind their own banner supporting the Kurdish struggle. All the French left parties were represented, with elected members standing out from the crowd with their blue, white and red sashes.

The final demonstration, in Place de la Republique, was addressed by the families of those killed and by leaders of the Kurdish community in Europe, and also by speakers from various organisations (including a representative from France's Armenian community) and from the mayor of the 10th Arrondissement and political parties.

The politicians not only stressed the importance of a full investigation of both triple murders, but also the need to delist the PKK and stop criminalising Kurdish politics.

Sylvie Jan, co-president of l'Association France Kurdistan observed how public support for the Kurds has grown over the ten years since the first assassination.

We heard some important and strong words, but full the weight of the demonstration was summed up in the [final lament](#), composed and sung by Diyar Mehrovi, a friend of the murdered musician Mîr Perwer.



Mathilde Panot, La France Insoumise MP  
addressing the protest in Paris. Photo:

Sarah Glynn

**French authorities have arrested the person who is alleged to have carried out the latest massacre and suggested that racism was his motive but Kurds and their supporters are not satisfied with this. Can you explain why?**

The Kurds have no faith in the French authorities because of their deliberate blocking of the investigation into the 2013 assassinations. The man accused of that earlier attack conveniently died of a brain tumour in December 2016, a few weeks before he was due to go on trial, and the case was closed.

However, there is a wealth of evidence that he was working for the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation and that the French state impeded the investigation, and they have closed access to crucial defence documents. The families of the murdered women began a civil action and managed to get the case reopened in 2019, but the state has refused the request of the judges to declassify the documents.

After the assassinations on December 23, the French Interior Minister, Gerald Darmanin, was very quick to declare that this was the action of a lone gunman – to dismiss any wider conspiracy and so rule out a terrorism investigation. The man who fired the gun was a Frenchman who has also been accused of an earlier racist attack on Somalis, but he was just out of prison, and could have been recruited to direct his violence against the Kurds by someone he met inside. The Kurds argue that there are several circumstances that suggest a planned and targeted attack.

With the approaching tenth anniversary of the first assassinations, this was a significant period, and at the time of the recent assassination there was supposed to be a large meeting at the community centre to plan for last Saturday's demonstration – thankfully, delayed an hour due to transport

problems. An attack at this time could have been an even worse disaster for the Kurdish community.

After shooting into the community centre – and making sure that Evîn Goyî was dead with a second shot – the gunman shot at the Kurdish restaurant opposite the centre, and then went down the road and entered the Kurdish hairdresser where he was eventually caught by the workers as he reloaded his gun. The community centre is an important place for the French Kurdish community and all three places are Kurdish. Shops of other nationalities between the restaurant and the hairdresser were not attacked.

The day after the recent assassinations, Turkey's Home Minister, Süleyman Soylu, stated: "Tayyip Erdoğan will not only purge the terrorists in Turkey, but also the terrorists in the world."

The Turkish government appears to want Kurds to believe that Turkey is behind this assassination, and to be confident that the French authorities will not investigate this.

In a [live broadcast](#) on CNN-Türk in February 2021, the former head of the Turkish General Staff's Intelligence Department not only admitted that the 2013 assassinations were an operation by the Turkish state, but also called for more of the same, telling viewers, "They also have their elements in Europe. We have to do something in this direction in Europe. I mean, it was already done once in Paris ..."

No action was taken then either.



Kurdish protest in Paris.

Photo: Sarah Glynn

**What are the barriers to a proper public investigation of the latest and the 2013 atrocities?**

It is widely understood that, for political reasons, the

French government will avoid any investigation that could implicate the Turkish state.

As in so many other areas, Turkey is allowed to spread their terror with impunity.

Interview originally published by Green Left (Australia)  
<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/france-25000-march-paris-demand-justice-assassinated-kurdish-activists>

Top photo: l'Anticapitaliste, credited to DR

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## **Jîna ‘Mahsa’ Amini Was Kurdish And That Matters – Say her Kurdish name.**

In 1852, writes Meral Çiçek, the 35-years old women's rights activist Tahirih Ghoratolein was executed by the Iranian regime in Tehran for two things: [her Bábí faith](#) and unveiling herself. Her last words were: “You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women.”

Almost exactly 170 years later, in the same city, a 22-year-old woman died after being arrested by the so-called guidance patrol, Islamic religious police who adhere to strict interpretations of sharia law. Her offence was not wearing the hijab in accordance with government standards. When the police detained her, the [woman's brother explained](#) they weren't from Tehran and were unaware of the city's rules (the family were visiting from Saqqez, a Kurdish city in the west, close to the border of Iraqi Kurdistan) to no avail: she was taken to a police station anyway. There, her family allege, she

was [“insulted and tortured”](#), collapsing before eventually being taken to hospital. Upon arrival doctors discovered the [woman had suffered](#) “brain death”. Two days later, she suffered a cardiac arrest and was unable to be resuscitated.

The woman’s name was Jîna, which means ‘life’ in Kurdish. *Jîn* (and its equivalent *Jiyan*) is etymologically related to *Jin*, the Kurdish word for woman. But the world has come to know her better in death by her Iranian name: Mahsa Amini.

Shortly after Amini’s violent death on 16 September, [protests broke out and spread from the Kurdish parts of Iran](#) to the whole country and the world. Demonstrators [chanted](#) the Kurdish slogan “jin, jiyan, azadî” – “woman, life, freedom”. But in news reports, particularly Western ones, Jîna Amini’s Kurdish identity has been erased – she is described as an Iranian woman and her ‘official’ Persian name ‘Mahsa’ – which for her family and friends existed only on state-documents – is the one in headlines. Calls to “say her name” echo in real life and across social media but unwittingly obscure Jîna’s real name and, in doing so, her Kurdish identity.

Iranian state discrimination against Kurds includes a widespread ban of Kurdish names which forces many families to register their children officially with non-Kurdish names, while maintaining their actual names at home. This in turn fragments the experience of many Kurds and creates an ‘official-legal’ and an ‘unofficial-illegal’ identity. The authentic ethnic-cultural identity loses its validity and a name that says nothing about your roots identifies you.

Some people that insist on calling Jîna Amini by her state-approved name Mahsa effectively argue that she did not lose her life under detention because she was Kurdish, but only because she was a woman. Therefore – according to the argument – it is not necessary or significant to call her by her Kurdish name.

Iran is an antidemocratic state, based on brutal rule. Anyone who is not part of the apparatus of oppression is in danger – no matter what sex, religion or ethnic group they belong to. Some are even more vulnerable than others. This is particularly the case for women and for Kurds.

It is likely that the immoral ‘morality police’ that arrested Jîna on 13 September at the entry of Shahid Haghani Expressway in the presence of her brother (who has also an unofficial Kurdish and an official Persian name) were aware of her ethnic identity. It is possible that they treated her with particular brutality because of it. It is likely that she resisted the insults and curses of the officers so much *because* of her identity and political consciousness as a Kurdish woman.

But regardless of whether or not her Kurdish identity played a significant role in the detention and brutal violence that led to Amini’s death, understating or concealing her ethnic origin represents a reproduction of colonial politics of the Iranian regime towards the Kurdish people. This attitude is a distillation of the power and suppression of the majority nation – even when expressed by well-meaning Persian feminists.

Amini’s death has seen Kurdish slogans calling for women’s liberation and revolution echo around the world. “Jin, jîyan, azadî” – and its translations – has reverberated through crowds and demonstrations held in solidarity with freedom-seeking women in Iran. Even in Afghanistan [women chanted the slogan](#), despite attacks on demonstrators by the Taliban.

This chant originated in the Kurdistan women’s liberation movement. It embodies the movement’s goal: to liberate life through a women’s revolution. It was first chanted collectively by [Kurdish women on 8 March 2006](#), at gatherings marking International Women’s Day across Turkey. After this came a period in which annual campaigns challenged patriarchal mindsets and misogynist practices within Kurdish society.

This period of intense struggle against patriarchy culminated in the Rojava revolution 10-years-ago, on 19 July 2012, which sent the slogan “jin, jiyar, azadî” echoing around the world, beyond the borders of Kurdistan.

The Kurdish women’s movement does not aim to monopolise this slogan, in contrast it aims to universalise it in the struggle for women’s democratic confederalism worldwide. Nevertheless, its roots and context should be acknowledged. Otherwise, we run the risk of emptying our slogans of active struggle and allowing them to lose their meaning. As I write this piece, women of the German party CDU/CSU – under whose government the Kurdish liberation movement has been criminalised the most – [are protesting Jîna’s killing](#) in Berlin, holding posters with the German translation of “jin, jiyar, azadî”.

**Jîna Amini was a Kurdish woman. Kurdish women have fought so hard not to be erased in life; do not let their stories be rewritten in death.**

*Meral Çiçek is a Kurdish political activist and journalist.*

This article was originally published by Novara Media: <https://novaramedia.com/2022/10/04/jina-mahsa-amini-was-kurdish-and-that-matters/>