

# **In support of the Kurdish people's struggle to live free and in dignity**

Monday 14 March 2016, by [Fourth International](#) (Date first published: 9 March 2016).

**The Bureau of the Fourth International, following the mandate of the International Committee meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, issued the following statement.**

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**1.** After two years of negotiations with the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, Erdogan's Sunnite authoritarian-neoliberal-Islamist regime decided to resume its bloody war on the Kurdish people, from summer 2015. And yet this summer had begun with an immense popular hope, following the outcome of the 7 June legislative elections. The exceptional 13% result won by HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party - the unitary left reformist party of the Kurdish movement) that, by doubling its votes, obliged AKP to form a coalition government, liable to break its domination in the spheres of the State apparatus. Moreover, this result prevented AKP from reaching the number of seats necessary to make a change in the constitution and bring in the autocratic presidential regime sought by R.T. Erdogan, and of which he would be the sultan.

**2.** As early as March 2015, Erdogan had already launched signals of his turn towards a hardline nationalism up against the loss in votes AKP seemed to undergo, moving towards the far right, hostile to negotiations but above all terrified by the October 2014 riots in support of the Kobanê resistance under siege by DAESH/Islamic state. This explosion of the rage of the Kurdish masses was based on an accumulation of disappointments caused by AKP refusal to take concrete measures in the frame of the "peace talks". This is compounded by the indignation growing out of the broadly shared conviction that AKP supported DAESH. This was based on the fact that Islamic State jihadists have long been able to pass through the Turkish-Syrian border in both directions without being controlled, and had the benefits of health care in hospitals near the border. And we know that the Turkish regime has always preferred and still explicitly prefers DAESH as a neighbour, to the Kurds. Finally, Erdogan declared that "the Kurdish question does not exist", forbidding any visits to Öcalan and thus suspending de facto the course of the negotiations declared in March 2013.

**3.** Dissatisfied with the legislative election outcome, AKP, under Erdogan's auspices, called for early elections. However the weakening of HDP was the sine qua non condition for AKP to come out a winner of the upcoming elections. This, in a most suspicious manner, the Suruc attack blamed on DAESH and the immediate reprisals by PKK "local units" causing the death of two police officers provided an opportunity to relaunch the war on the Kurds and by so doing, criminalise HDP considered as the legal branch of the "terrorist organisation". The climate of civil war accompanied by violent repression against all social and political protest, a criminalisation of the opposition press and a strengthening of nationalism leading to attempted pogroms against the Kurds finally produced results. AKP easily won the early elections on 1 November 2015.

**4.** From then on, a terror regime was in force. Erdogan's party-State mobilised openly fascist and

Islamist “antiterrorist” brigades linked to the police and the gendarmerie to crush all protest and resistance in Turkish Kurdistan. The different neighbourhoods of the cities of Diyarbakir, Mardin, Şırnak, Hakkari where young Kurdish urban militias linked to PKK (but not under its direct control) declared “democratic autonomy” – parallel to the Rojava model – under curfew for several months by then, facing famine, under siege and destroyed by the military tanks and armoured vehicles. Hundreds of bodies, some completely burnt and unrecognizable, lay beneath the rubble, more than one hundred thousand residents had to flee their homes. According to Human Rights Foundation of Turkey figures, 224 civilians (including 42 children), 414 activists and 198 members of the police and military apparatus have died between mid-August 2015 and the beginning of February 2016.

**5.** The choice of the PKK and the YDG-H (Movement of Patriotic Revolutionary Youth) urban militias to shift the conflicts from the mountains to the towns – contrary moreover to Öcalan’s earlier recommendations – can of course provoke some discussions on tactics. This conflict atmosphere has clearly weakened the possibility of a hearing for the HDP’s democratic, militant and pro-peace message, while they had succeeded in imposing themselves as a hegemonic pole for broad sectors of the population – going beyond the Kurdish people – opposed to Erdogan’s dictatorial temptations and the state manoeuvres to Islamize society.

But the responsibility for this tragedy lies clearly with the Erdogan regime and its instrumentalisation of its different policies with respect to the Kurdish people with an aim of consolidating its power, moreover this fuels nationalist feelings on both sides and deeply undermines the possibilities of a common life for both peoples.

We condemn the Erdogan regime’s and AKP’s belligerent policies. We demand that the Turkish state put a stop to the massacres and that it raise the curfews and blockades underway in Kurdish towns. We also demand that those responsible for violations of the rights of man and woman be identified and sentenced.

We call upon the Turkish state to put an end to Öcalan’s isolation and resume negotiations with the different components of the Kurdish movement in order to establish the conditions of a lasting peace, which can only be achieved by meeting the Kurdish people’s democratic and social demands.

We also denounce the complicity of Western imperialisms and notably of the European Union which, terrified of the migration wave – for which it is also partly responsible – seems willing to live with a regime of repression and massacre, on the condition that Turkey accepts to become an enormous holding camp for migrants, far from its sight. We demand an end to the persecution and legal charges against the Kurdish movement in Europe. The PKK must be removed from the list of terrorist organisations in Europe and everywhere else.

We express our support to the Kurdish people in their struggle to live in dignity, to the HDP that faces unparalleled criminalisation by the State apparatus, to the radical left activists, to activists for peace and the defence of human rights, to academics and journalists persecuted by Erdogan’s nationalist and confessional authoritarian regime.

**6.** The war waged by the Turkish state against the Kurdish movement, like the PKK’s strategy, are now mainly determined by the developments occurring in Syria. The consolidation and broadening of the administrations under its control through its brother party PYD (Party of Democratic Union) in northern Syria (Rojava) is far more important for the PKK than the gains it can make through negotiations with the Turkish state, notably from the standpoint of its historical competition with Barzani’s feudal and pro-US line to instaurer his hegemony over the Kurdish people divided among four countries (Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria).

As for Turkey, in its aim of becoming the hegemonic regional power in the Middle East, since the beginning of the Syrian popular uprising, in the first months the Erdogan regime first sought a sort of negotiation between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, then centred its foreign policy on an active involvement in the Syrian question, counting on a rapid overthrow of al-Assad.

In this aim, Turkey firstly supported the Syrian National Council dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and the liberal opposition and with the militarisation of the uprising, against the regime's violent pressure, it did not hesitate to support on different levels (political, financial, logistic, military, medical) different armed jihadist groups including DAESH, either directly or indirectly.

**7.** One of the main reasons for the Erdogan regime's engagement in the fight for the overthrow of al-Assad was the presence of a strong Kurdish population on the Turkey-Syria border. The formation of a Kurdish regional administration in northern Iraq after the imperialist intervention in 2003 was doubtless one of the most significant political traumas experienced by the Turkish state.

Thus, it is obvious that the fear of seeing the same scenario reoccur following a regime change in Syria was what pushed the Turkish government to attempt to intervene in the Syrian crisis. However, the situation became all the more critical that following the retreat of the regime's armed forces from part of Syrian Kurdistan in July 2012, the PYD succeeded in taking control over this region on the Turkish border, later to proclaim autonomy there.

Today, the Turkish government is implementing a blockade on the Turkish/ Syria border obstructing the solidarity efforts with Rojava organized in Turkey and abroad. We condemn the employment of border control by governments to frustrate civil initiatives against oppression and support the campaigns against this blockade.

**8.** Emerging from the PKK decentralisation trend in 2003, PYD still recognises Abdullah Öcalan's ideological and political leadership. Following the "Rojava Revolution" the administration of the three districts of Jazira, Afrin and Kobanê represents an attempt to implement Öcalan's strategy of "democratic autonomism" (or "democratic federalism"), which was supposed to replace the PKK's former adherence to Marxism-Leninism (which it had renounced in the early 1990s). The Rojava Charter proclaimed in January 2013 is based on democratic, secular, multiculturalist principles and is marked by a deep ecological sensibility. The emphasis on the rights of women, of ethnic and religious minorities is impressive, especially in the midst of the Syrian chaos. And despite the prevailing instability in the region, all these commitments do not remain totally in abeyance, although of course they deserve to be taken further. However, in this original and progressive self-administration experience, political pluralism is practically absent. The PYD, without a strong historic presence in Rojava, succeeded in instaurer its hegemony after its return from exile, from Iraqi Kurdistan, in large part thanks to its military power (YPG: Peoples' Protection Units). Which it did not hesitate to use either to repress the various local currents of Kurdish nationalism, as well as the democratic networks of young Kurdish activists profoundly committed to the revolutionary uprising. We also add that in certain towns such as Hassake and Qamichli, even after the autonomy declaration, the Assad regime continued to retain a presence.

**9.** Today, the PYD and YPG, thanks to their heroic resistance in Kobanê (in which Turkish revolutionary organisations, the Free Syrian Army and Peshmergas of Iraqi Kurdistan groups have also taken part) against DAESH barbarism, benefit from a largely-deserved international prestige. The PYD position on the terrain and its effectiveness in combat have paradoxically made it a privileged ally, on the one hand of Washington, which is intent on not getting mired in the Syrian chaos, in which the former bears a major responsibility and on the other hand Moscow, which since 30 September 2015 is involved in a military intervention in the conflict at the sides of al-Assad's

bloody regime, of Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah in order to increase its domination in the region. However, Erdogan is attempting at any price to prevent the region extending from Azas to Jarablus – in large part under DAESH control – from falling into the hands of PYD-PKK, because it is the only part of its borders with Syria not currently controlled by Kurdish forces.

Thus, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) whose main component are the YPG, with the support of Russian air raids are very effectively fighting the different Jihadist groups; DAESH, El Nusra or Ahrar El Sham and other, so-called moderate Salafist groups, armed and backed by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. However, these advances and victories of SDF troops face contradictions because of the pragmatic alliance policies on the ground. The latter can find themselves side by side with regime forces or in competition with them to occupy “adversary” territory first.

Furthermore, as a consequence of the domination of Salafist-Jihadist groups in zones liberated from the regime and in cases of the formers’ interpenetration with the Free Syrian Army, the SDF and thus the YPG often come into conflict with FSA and the very heterogenic local rebel militias, which increases the risks of the local population seeing them as on the regime’s side.

Moreover, accusations of displacements of Arab populations in certain regions launched against the YPG, based on several reports and testimonies, also reinforce the feeling of suspicion of the PYD, on a background of ethnic tensions in northern Syrian regions, which have gone on for decades between Arabs and Kurds. Finally, adding the fact that the leading forces (liberal and linked to the Muslim Brotherhood) within the Syrian National Coalition backed by Turkey and the Gulf monarchies, support the Turkish regime’s repression against the PKK, take Arab chauvinist lines and provide no guarantee of Kurdish national rights explains PYD’s suspicion of this opposition.

**10.** The Fourth International reaffirms its opposition to any form of military intervention in Syria and any imperialist plan for dividing up Syria. These imperialist and sub-imperialist interventions only goal is to strengthen the self interests of these world or regional powers and amount to a further catastrophe for the Syrian peoples. We demand an immediate stop to Russian bombings and all other bombings and the withdrawal of all foreign belligerent forces.

We think on the other hand that faced with jihadist barbarism, or that of the regime and against any form of oppression the Syrian populations have the right to defend themselves by the different means that they can find.

Despite the criticisms we may make with respect to certain PYD and FDS practices, we salute their combat against the reactionary and jihadist forces that are one of the poles of counter-revolution in Syria and express our full solidarity with the Kurdish people’s struggle for their self-determination. And we resolutely souligner that the destiny of the Kurdish people’s self-determination and that of the Syrian revolution are profoundly linked. The emancipation of the region’s peoples can only be achieved by the overthrow of the authoritarian regimes and freedom from the hold of the great powers and multinationals, through an alliance of the popular classes of these peoples.

**Bureau of the Fourth International, Paris, 9 March 2016**

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\* <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4398>