

Qamishli, February 2019

Dear visitor,

A salute to those who seek a life of justice, equality and freedom.

Women all across the world suffer from great injustices. But women in my homeland, Kurdistan, are faced with a double injustice. For one, our Kurdistan remains under the occupation of four countries, Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq, in addition to our struggle against an oppressive patriarchal society. In our struggle, we have had to choose either to surrender to occupation and patriarchy, or mount a resistance movement against all forms of injustice. Many of us chose to fight for our freedom and for the liberation of our society. Fortunately, the Kurdish liberation movement that emerged in the 1970s paved the way for women's participation, thousands of whom joined the Kurdish political and military struggle. For the first time, women left their homes and faced towards the bigger struggle. In 1993, the first steps towards establishing a women's army was taken in the mountains of Kurdistan. Heroines were born among our ranks, women who defied tyranny in the Turkish fascist state prisons, like Sakine Cansız, who lost their lives in battle, and who partook in organizing and raising awareness among women. A powerful women's movement had been established in Kurdistan. It was truly a women's revolution that renounced backward traditions and customs, and defended the causes of national and gender liberation.

In Syrian Kurdistan, we built on this revolution's legacy, operating secretly while preparing and organizing women. These activities condemned tens of us into incarceration and death at the hands of the Syrian state army. But we never faltered. When the popular uprising broke in 2011, we began to work openly in the name of Kongra Star (a women's organization) and we founded women's academies with the aim of building women's revolutionary awareness. Later, due to the attack on our territories by anti-democratic and anti-liberation forces, women participated actively in all aspects of political, social, cultural, economic and

military life to defend their fellow citizens. Within a few years, we managed to save thousands of women who were victims of domestic abuse by establishing the Women's House associations, which defended women's rights and helped them solve their social problems.

In northern and eastern Syria, we have established, as communities and as women, an administrative, political, cultural, social and economic system that recognizes and protects the rights of all of its societal components. Young women and men have battled bravely against ISIS to defend humanity from this pernicious existence. In our struggle, thousands of people have fallen and we have made so many dear sacrifices, so that this democratic oasis could thrive amidst the Middle Eastern desert. For the first time, a system is being constructed that defends pluralism and grants freedom of expression in all languages and ethnicities across northern and eastern Syria. For the first time, we have a system which grants women the freedom to self-organize; a system that accords women equal participation in all administrative councils under a co-presidency system. We have passed the Women's Law, which forbids underage marriage and polygamy, criminalizes domestic abuse and grants women their rights in children's custody.

Also for the first time, women have established the Women's Protection Units appointed to defend women against extremist attacks and to guard their freedom. The Women's Protection Units have liberated the Kurdish Yezidi women who were detained by ISIS in Sinjar. During those years, world's first academy of Jineoloji (Women's Science) was established, and the women's village was built to house the hundreds of women who had been subject to injustice and who are socially and economically challenged. Tens of academies have followed since, seeking to raise awareness among women. Furthermore, we have developed women's cooperatives, which have secured women's financial independence. We have laid the foundation for a system of justice that supports the rights of women, and thus have accomplished in eight short years what otherwise would have required eighty years.

This women's revolution has emerged from our Kurdish lands, but has outgrown itself and extended towards the Arab territories in northern and eastern Syria and has borne a great impact on women's conditions in Assyrian, Turkman and Circassian communities as well as in the whole of Syria. Today we can claim that the women's revolution no longer belongs only to the Kurdish women, it is the revolution of all women in northern and eastern Syria, and this is the achievement we take greatest pride in. Today women feel more confident and are more conscious of their rights. They have gained the strength and the courage to stand up for their rights and to persist in their struggle for liberation. Despite the wars, we have witnessed in Syria, the attacks from ISIS and the Syrian regime's oppression, we have worked together with all ethno-cultural constituents to achieve a way of life in which freedom, democracy and equality prevail. In uniting as peoples and as women, we have demonstrated that the democratic forces can achieve the impossible through unity, sound principles and a correct strategy.

Yet the reactionary forces, led by Turkey and ISIS, never cease to attack this democratic project. They have occupied the Kurdish Afrin territory, where they have systematically committed ethnic genocide and demographic resettlement affecting more than 400 thousand civilians who are now condemned to living in refugee camps. This is exacerbated by the Turkish forces' raping of women, the imposition of the wearing of the veil and forced marriage, along with the perpetual threat to assault other self-governing territories in north-east Syria. All of these actions have aimed at casting women and multi-ethnic groups into a fundamental dictatorship based on fanatic ideologies which deny women and peoples their legitimate rights. The hegemonic forces joined against humanity spare no effort to drag us backwards; to hinder any attempt at democratic progress, in order to sustain a state of backwardness and slavery to which people, women and the poor are condemned.

Dear visitor,

The women's revolution has inspired and attracted so many women from across the world. Tens of them in the ranks of the Women's Protection Units have died fighting ISIS. Therefore, we believe that our accomplishment belongs to them, to all the women of the world. It is a value that has been attained through collective efforts. And so, our call is for you to stand in solidarity with us against the warfare of the Turkish state and ISIS attacks, and to pressure the international community to impose an air embargo on our territories for the sake of ensuring security and stability. We have defended the world against ISIS and now the Turkish state along with extremist forces that seek to exterminate us just as they did in Afrin.

In the end, we await your visit in our territories to witness what we have accomplished in those years, and to exchange experiences, because we believe that if we unite in mind and heart, we can create a divine power that can defeat the most brutal forms of injustice.

My greetings to you, and let us raise the slogan: In this general movement backwards, let's move towards a democratic, ethical and free society.

Your friend, Fouza Al-Youssef