

# Turkey's drone war against the women-led democratic system in North and East Syria

Targeted killing of three officials of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria by Turkish drone strike on June 20, 2023.



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**KONGRA STAR**  
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## **Turkey's drone war against the women-led democratic system in North and East Syria**

This dossier will examine the killing of three officials of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria by a Turkish drone strike on June 20, 2023. It will put the killings into legal and political context, and make arguments for urgent action needed to defend human rights and uphold international law.

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## 1. Context – The Turkish drone war against North and East Syria

Since 2020, Turkey has systematically used armed drones to assassinate those who play an important role in the women's movement and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. The beginning of this drone war was June 23, 2020, with the deaths of Zehra Berkel, Hebûn Mele Xelîl and Amina Waysî, members of Kongra Star Coordination.<sup>1</sup> They were killed in a targeted drone attack on a private house in the village of Heliç near Kobanê.

Since then, Turkey has been systematically and deliberately launching drone attacks against the population of North and East Syria. It frequently targets civilians and infrastructure to weaken the social movement in North and East Syria. Since the beginning of the year alone, the Turkish state has carried out 31 drone strikes in North and East Syria. In the process, 48 people have been killed, including 13 civilians, and 38 people, including 12 civilians, have been injured.

In recent weeks in particular, Turkey has launched a new phase of its operations<sup>3</sup> against the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, escalating with airstrikes. Since June 12, Turkey has expanded its shelling and drone strikes into northern Syria, hitting 35 locations with more than 50 projectiles, killing dozens of people.

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1 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/women/zehra-hebun-amina-murdered-by-the-turkish-state-44787>

2 Documented by Rojava Information Center. On killing of civilians:  
<https://twitter.com/RojavaIC/status/1671433386110459913?cxt=HHwWkoC9zePzj7luAAAA>

3 Recorded by the Monitoring and Documentation Department of North Press Agency  
<https://npasyria.com/en/99934/>



## **2. Events of 20th June 2023 – Drone attack on civilian officials of the Autonomous Administration North and East Syria**

On the morning of the 20th of June, the Turkish state carried out a drone strike in the village of Til Şeir, northwest of the Tirbespiyê district in Qamishlo Canton. The Turkish drone targeted a vehicle carrying officials of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) on a busy and crowded road, killing three people and seriously injuring one.

The attack came while the vehicle was on its way to visit civil facilities of the AANES. The co-chair of the Qamishlo Region Council, Yusra Darwish, the deputy co-chair, Leyman Shouish, and their driver, Farat Toma, were killed. Co-chair Gabi Shamoun was grievously injured.

The attack was a double-tap air strike. Co-chairman of Qamishlo Region Council Gabi Shamoun, who was seriously injured in the attack, said that the driver died immediately after the first strike. He was able to get out of the car and tried to open the door to pull his colleagues out of the car before it burst into flames, but then the second strike hit.

### **Who is being targeted:**

This attack targeted the civilian population and the democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. This attack was directed at undermining the achievements of the democratic system, which include gender equality. Once again, politically active women and pioneers of a democratically just society were attacked. At no time did those who were targeted pose a threat to Turkey's security: those attacked did not plan attacks on Turkey, nor did they participate in military actions or violate any laws. In fact, this drone attack carried out by Turkey violates international law and meets the definition of a war crime.



## The identities of the victims of the attack are as follows:



**Yusra Darwish:** Yusra Mihemed Darwish was born in 1972 in Amude in the canton of Qamishlo. She participated in the women's movement in North and East Syria from its beginning. Darwish worked for social change and the organisation of social and political activities in the canton from the very start, being involved in community organising. When she was killed in the Turkish drone attack, she was the co-chair of Qamishlo Canton.



**Leyman Shouish:** Also known as Reiyhan Amude, Leyman Shouish was born in 1968 in Amude in the canton of Qamishlo. She was politically active for more than 38 years and had shown serious commitment to democracy, women's liberation and peaceful coexistence of the different population groups in the region. In her struggle for these goals, she relocated to Minbic in 2016 after its liberation from the clutches of ISIS, to help build a democratic system there. Throughout her life, she took on many duties, most recently representing the Kongra Star women's movement in Southern Kurdistan and eventually becoming the deputy co-chair of the Qamishlo Canton. She was killed in the drone attack.



**Firat Daniel Tuma** was born in Iraq in 1979 and was a member of the Syriac Union Party. As a Syriac, he worked within the Autonomous Administration for the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups. He was the driver of the car that was hit and died on June 20, 2023 in Turkey's drone attack.



**Gabi Shamoun:** The co-chair of the Qamishlo Region Council, was wounded in the head and was taken to a hospital in Qamishlo.



## Pictures from the scene





### 3. The politics of Turkey's war

With these attacks, the Turkish state aims to destabilize the region, undermine efforts to fight ISIS, displace the original inhabitants of the area and destroy the democratic project of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. This is a continuation of the Turkish state's fascist project against Kurdish people within and outside its borders.

Turkey's attacks intensified shortly after the Autonomous Administration announced it would bring ISIS captives in northern and eastern Syria to justice without support from the international community. Over a period of many years, AANES has been calling on the international community to try captured ISIS members before an international tribunal, but this call has gone unanswered. It is also well documented that Turkey has also in the past smuggled ISIS members out of Al Hol Camp and targeted security forces at facilities where ISIS prisoners were held. The Turkish state relies on ISIS to create instability in the region.

Turkey hopes that instability will give it the advantage to occupy other regions in northern Syria. With drone strikes and constant artillery barrage along the border zone, Turkey is trying to drive the population to flee so it can continue to illegally invade the region, occupy it and force a demographic change.

Turkey is attacking the region under the pretence of counter-terrorism, but the real reason is that Turkey sees the grass-roots democratic and gender-equitable system in northern and eastern Syria as a threat to its dictatorial rule and its expansionist dreams of a new Ottoman Empire.



## 4. Our demands

As Kongra Star, coalition of grassroots women's groups in Rojava (West Kurdistan / North Syria), we are committed to women's rights and democracy in the region. We observe with concern the attacks by the Turkish state on the region and the accompanying waves of refugees, human rights violations and destabilization of the region.

We demand the following:

- Members of the Global Coalition to Fight Daesh, and the international community, must ensure that Turkey stops its aggression against the Autonomous Administration and the self-defence forces of North and East Syria. All attacks must be immediately halted.
- Turkey's plans to launch a new military occupation offensive must not be tolerated and allowed to go ahead.
- The airspace of North and East Syria must be closed to Turkish warplanes as well as armed or unarmed UAVs.
- Turkey must be held accountable for all war crimes.
- Turkey must immediately withdraw from the illegally occupied regions.