



## Open Letter to the United Nations

to Secretary General, Mr. António Guterres  
to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk  
to the Human Rights Committee, the Human Rights Council and its President, Mr. Václav Bálek  
to the General Assembly and its President, Mr. Dennis Francis  
to the Security Council

Dear Mr. António Guterres, Dear Mr. Volker Türk, Dear Mr. Václav Bálek, Dear Mr. Dennis Francis, and Dear Members of the United Nations and especially of the Security Council

Since October 4, 2023, repeated aggression by Turkey against the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) and the Kurdish, Arab, Armenian, Circassian, Turkmen and Assyrian people living and governing themselves in the region, has moved us to address this Open Letter to you and to all peoples of the United Nations.

As womens' movements and support networks from North and East Syria, we call upon you to take responsibility in accordance with the principles of international law and the objectives of the United Nations. We insist that you take immediate action to ensure the Turkish state ends its current acts of aggression.

In the first sentence of the preamble to the UN Charter, it is written that "We the peoples of the United Nations [are] determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

We, as women living in North and East Syria, are currently experiencing this "scourge of war" again on a dramatic scale.

On the 4th of October, 2023, Turkey declared war on the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria in a public statement by the Foreign Minister, threatening extensive attacks on the region's infrastructure. In justifying its aggression, Turkey referred to an attack carried out by the PKK in Ankara on the 1st of October and accused the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria of being linked to it.

In the past, Turkey has repeatedly used attacks to legitimize its war of aggression against the autonomous region in North and East Syria, such as a bomb attack in the populated city center of Istanbul in November 2022, which was carried out by unknown forces.

In this way, it conceals its own political intention to destabilize, depopulate and occupy the region in North and East Syria and seeks to justify human rights and war crimes committed in this context. Since the revolution in 2012, Turkey has taken every opportunity to hinder the development of an alternative democratic model of society by the Kurdish people in North and East Syria, in which all peoples can govern themselves.

Currently, since its declaration on 4 October, Turkey has repeatedly committed war crimes and attacks on human rights with its acts of aggression against the people of North and East Syria. In the form of airstrikes, drone attacks, and with heavy weapons, it has so far carried out over 70 intentional attacks on civilians, civilian objects, villages, places of residence and work, and vital infrastructure, with the aim of wearing down the population physically and psychologically by denying them basic supplies of electricity, water, and food. This is a clear violation of international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians, the injured and the sick as set out e.g. in the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute.

- Turkey regularly carries out attacks on **hospitals and health care** facilities. Most recently, two hospitals equipped for the Corona pandemic, which also provide general health care to the population, were each destroyed by airstrikes on 6 October, 2023 in the village of Giri Fara near Derik and in the city of Kobane.
- Turkey deliberately attacks institutions for the **protection of refugees**. For example, on 5 October, 2023, the area surrounding the Washokanî refugee camp in the western city of Al-Hasakah was bombed several times within a few hours. As a result, all 12 humanitarian organizations in the camp stopped their work. They evacuated their staff and left the people behind unprotected.
- Turkey specifically attacks objects that are vital for the civilian people, this includes in particular the **drinking water supply**. On Thursday (05.10.23), for example, there was an attack on the Al-Hamma water station, which supplies a large area of the city of Hasakah with water, and on Friday (06.10.23) there was an attack on the Khana Sere water station in the Derik region.
- Turkey is targeting **food production** facilities, crop stocks, and agricultural areas. e.g., a farm in Msheirefa Hama, north of Al-Hasakah city, was attacked by drones on 04.10.2023 and a grain silo in Amude on 06.10.2023.
- Turkey is attacking in particular the necessary **energy supply** for the civilian population. Since 04.10.23, more than 30 electricity, gas, and oil facilities have been destroyed or damaged by droneattacks and airstrikes. These included, for example, a power plant in Tirbespiye on 05.10.2023 and a transformer station in Qamishlo on 06.10.23, which until then had provided power to the local flour factory.
- Turkey is targeting **populated places**, villages, residential and work places e.g. on 05.10.2023 a school in Dad Ebdal in Zirgan was damaged by drones. On 04.10.2023, a brick factory in Al-Hasakah city was attacked by drones and on 06.10.2023, a textile factory in Amude was attacked. In the region of Derik, Kobane, Amude and Til Tamr, there were multiple airstrikes and heavy weapons fire on inhabited villages.

In addition to these current attacks, we see it as our responsibility to point out that the protection of the civilian populations in the areas of Efrîn and Serê Kaniyê, which are occupied by Turkey in violation of international law, have not been guaranteed to this day. Looting and destruction by armed gangs, torture and violence directed against the civilian population & especially women, the disappearance of people, and the settlement of external population groups are examples of human rights and war crimes that are part of the everyday life of the people in these areas. We know of more than 250 cases of women abducted since 2018 in the occupied region of Efrîn. There are also repeated attacks on inhabited areas. For example, the Turkish army and its mercenaries bombed several villages in Shara and Sherawa on 05.10.2023.

As women's movements and associations, we not only oppose Turkey's human rights and war crimes against the people, but we also point out the danger of the restriction of women's rights and the destruction of a social model that guarantees political and social participation and the freedom of women like no other.

20 years ago, we, the women of North and East Syria, began to organize. Since the revolution in 2012, we have taken responsibility as women in the construction of a democratic system whose basis includes the freedom of women. We have grown into a strong multi-ethnic women's movement. We have built independent women's structures, councils and associations and we have achieved an awareness in society that a life in which women are not free is no longer conceivable. We participate and struggle every day in all political bodies and social institutions to further improve these structures and the situation of women.

The system that has been created in this way in North and East Syria with the recognition of women's rights, their social and political participation, it is unique in the Middle East and a great benefit for all women and all people in the region.

As women, we have participated in the fight against ISIS and made heavy sacrifices because it is our natural responsibility to protect our society and all the peoples living here, but also because it is existentially about defending our lives and our freedom as women. We consider it necessary to protect the achievements of the women's movement from the physical attacks and the regressive, fundamentalist ideology of ISIS.

The current declaration of war and attacks by the Turkish state against AANES and its infrastructure are also attacks against the strong women's movement in the region. They stem from a fundamentalist and misogynist ideology also represented by Turkey's political leadership. They are a continuation and intensification of Turkey's drone attacks, which have been going on for more than three years, and which have so far targeted and murdered more than 30 leading women in politics, society, defense forces, and amongst civilians.

These included, for example, five young women at an UN-sponsored education center on 08.08.22, Zeyneb Mihemed, co-chair of the Justice Office of the Autonomous Administration of the Cizîrê region on 27.09.22, the co-chair of the Autonomous Administration in Qamişlo Canton, Yusra Darwish and her deputy Liman Shiweh on 20.06.23, and most recently, on 15.09.23, the YPJ commander Shervin Serdar, who made an important contribution in the battles against ISIS, for example in the offensives of Minbic, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

Destabilizing the region through the current attacks also paves the way for ISIS to rebuild, reorganize and entrench itself in the region. This endangers not only the safety and security of us women, but it also puts the entire world community at risk.

Because the enforcement of international law and the punishment of human rights and war crimes is reserved solely for the nations recognized as states and members of the UN, and is bound to the ratification of the relevant conventions, we as a women's movement and as the representatives of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria are unable to take legal action to prevent Turkey from committing human rights violations and war crimes. For our right to peace on the basis

of the principles of equality, self-determination and justice and for the compliance with international humanitarian law, we ourselves can only stand up with our voice.

To this day, none of the states of the United Nations have been willing to put their own political relations at risk by taking a clear stance or making an accusation against the Turkish state. In doing this, they have failed to give the ethical and valuable principles of international law the priority that is actually intrinsic to that law.

It is precisely this continuing silence of the United Nations and the international community, as well as the impunity of the occupation policy, which is contrary to international law, that has encouraged and enabled the Turkish state to continue its ongoing war crimes for years.

Accordingly, we write this Open Letter to insist that you take responsibility based on the objectives set out in the UN Charter and work to ensure that Turkey brings its current acts of aggression to an end.

We demand that you hold Turkey accountable for its human rights violations and war crimes.

We urgently call for the establishment of a no-fly zone over North and East Syria to prevent future aggression by the Turkish state and war crimes taking place in this context, as well as to stop the systematic use of combat drones for extralegal executions of activists, politicians, and women leaders working for peace, for women's freedom, for self-determination, and for building a democratic society in North and East Syria.

We therefore appeal to the international community, the members and institutions of the United Nations, and explicitly to the UN Security Council, to assume their responsibility to protect people from war and crimes against humanity.

09.10.23, North and East Syria

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Women's Council of North and East Syria  
Armenien Women's Union  
Research and Protection of Women's Rights Center  
Syrian Women's Council  
Syriac Women's Union in Syria  
Yezidi Women's Union of Rojava  
Zenubia Women's Gathering