



NWSA Statement on Rojava

President Trump's removal of US troops from Syria and his green-light to President Erdogan of Turkey to invade Kurdish territory in northeast Syria is a devastating move that has created chaos in the region, led to death and displacement of civilians, and put in jeopardy a fledgling democratic experiment in that region.

Rojava is a de-facto semi-autonomous region in Northern Syria run by a Kurdish-led pluralist, gender-egalitarian movement with socialist, anarchist, and feminist inspiration. It's a remarkable democratic initiative in a country torn apart by civil war. Rojava became autonomous in 2012, when Assad withdrew his troops to fight elsewhere. In 2014, Rojava was heavily attacked by ISIS, which besieged the city of Kobane. Rojava's mixed-gender militias successfully defeated ISIS, leading to an alliance with the U.S. But this fragile tactical alliance was a convergence of interests, not values. Rojava never got the diplomatic, economic, or political support it needed because of the U.S. State Department's long relationship with Turkey, which considers any Kurdish activist a terrorist.

The Kurdish freedom movement adopted as its goal a decentralized system called "democratic confederalism" based on grassroots democracy and a social contract that foregrounds feminism, ecological sustainability, and popular participation. Women have been central participants and crafters of the radical changes in Rojava and the wider Kurdish freedom movement. The movement in Rojava advocates autonomous self-governing communities with gender education programs and organizational mechanisms like men and women co-chairs in every institution, including the military. They are also trying to develop a mixed economy centering on co-ops, with no extremes of wealth. In an area with many ethnic and religious minorities, they are committed to pluralism, inclusivity, and separation between religion and politics. Rojava has thus become an inspiring example for people around the world committed to an inclusive, feminist, grassroots democracy and is targeted not simply as a military threat but as an alternative political example.

The right-wing patriarchal and nationalist Turkish regime of President Erdogan deems the people of Rojava "terrorists" and has been set on destroying them for years. The removal of the small core of U.S. troops in the region paved the way for that to happen. The violence unleashed over the past two weeks by Turkey and the armed Syrian groups it supports, including some with ties to ISIS and al Qaeda, has been devastating. They have bombed civilian institutions, such as schools and hospitals, and attacked humanitarian and medical aid workers. Hundreds of thousands have fled from their homes. And recently, Hevrin Khalaf, a Kurdish woman politician and champion of democracy, was brutally murdered. Erdogan

openly said in a speech at the UN that he plans to take over a large section of Rojava, evict the Kurds who live there, and replace them with Syrian refugees from ethnic and religious groups he prefers. This is ethnic cleansing, and it is a war crime.

The invasion of Rojava is part of a broader pattern of authoritarianism and repression waged by Erdogan to deal with opposition within Turkey. He has imprisoned thousands of Kurdish activists, attempted to suppress women and LGBTQI activists, and persecuted dissenting academics, many of whom have been fired, arrested, or forced to go underground.

We encourage NWSA members to speak out and take action, hold teach-ins to educate our students and one another about this important trans-national struggle. People can sign onto an academic and cultural boycott of Turkey here.

SIGNED by the Executive Committee (EC) with affiliations*

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