

## CALL ON U.K. GOVERNMENT TO CONDEMN THE TURKISH INVASION OF AFRIN (NORTHERN SYRIA)

We, the undersigned, call on the leaders of the U.K., and all other world powers to condemn Turkey's unprovoked attack on the people of Afrin in Syria.

Afrin, whose population is predominantly Kurdish, but is also made up of Arabs, Yezidis, Armenian and Assyrian Christians, among many others, has until now been one of the most stable and secure regions in Syria. With very little international aid, Afrin has taken in so many Syrian refugees in the last five years that its population has doubled to 400,000. While its defenders, the YPG or People's Protection Units, are part of the Syrian Democratic Forces allied with the US military in its war with the Islamic State, Afrin itself is surrounded by enemies: Turkish-supported jihadi groups, al Qaeda, and Turkey.

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan first threatened, and is now making good on his threats to attack the region, simply on ideological grounds, without even the pretext of the YPG having attacked or threatened them in any way. This is an act of unilateral violence, and as such, a violation of Nuremberg principles (that waging a war of aggression is the "supreme war crime"), and, if recent statements by Erdogan are to be believed, the ultimate intention of the Turkish invasion is to carry out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the region's Kurdish population. It is unusual that a military incursion is begun with an open declaration of an intention to commit war crimes; but in this instance that appears to be the case.

This makes the UK government response all the more extraordinary. Spokespersons for Theresa May, and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, have effectively supported the invasion, declaring that "Turkey has a right to want to keep its borders secure." By this logic any country on earth would have the right to invade any of its neighbours at any time.

Until now, the region has been the place of a world-historical democratic experiment. Local assemblies and councils, women's councils, and assemblies have been created, along with women's police and military units; the YPG also has a long track record of setting up local democratic governing councils in each of the towns it has liberated from ISIS. It has made repeated statements that it has no interest in Turkey and wishes to function only as a defense force for Syrian Kurds and other ethnicities living in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS), also known as "Rojava," which includes Afrin. Rather, it is this very democratic ideology that the Turkish government objects to, claiming it is inspired by the "terrorist" PKK. In other words, rather than welcoming a feminist, ecological, democratic experiment, international powers are siding with a power who is unleashing an unprovoked military assault on the region for just that reason.

Turkey has now begun an overwhelming air assault and ground invasion of Afrin, which has already resulted in significant civilian casualties. Some of these were ironically, refugees who had fled other regions of Syria for Afrin's relative stability and safety.

This attack is a blatant act of aggression against a peaceful and democratically-governed region and population. The Kurdish people have endured the loss of thousands of young men and women who joined the YPG, and YPJ women's force, to rid the world of ISIS. The U.K. and the international community (U.S., Russia, E.U. members, etc) have a moral obligation to stand behind the Kurdish people, Yezidi people, and others threatened with ethnic cleansing. We call on U.K. officials to demand Turkey pull back its invading forces immediately and to cease threats against its neighbours.

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