

DEMOCRATIC NATION

Four YPJ
fighters tell us how
they have have changed
themselves and taken on the
responsibility to live the idea of a
democratic nation



YPJ Information & Documentation Office

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In Rojava a revolution is happening on the basis of a long term struggle of the people, it started more than ten years ago, and since then the life of society has fundamentally changed. One of the aspirations of this revolution is to propose a solution for the Kurdish Question, for the problems of the Middle East, and for a democratic transformation in general. It has been achieved by the continued struggle of the people and at its core, by the liberation struggle of women. It has been recognized worldwide by democratic movements and individuals. In those years the society has changed a lot and, it is always important to understand those transformations. One of the core issues that the Middle East faces today is how to overcome the politics of oppression, assimilation, and genocide: a solution to those problems ultimately also means building an alternative to the nationstate system.

The centralization of the nation state is linked to the development of capitalism, because capitalism centralizes power in monopolies and intensifies fanatical ideas of nation-hood to an end point that inhibits diversity. In his writings, Abdullah Öcalan criticizes the positivist mentality that approaches any phenomenon in a strictly analytical way – an approach opens the way to genocidal politics when it comes to the question of nations. At the same time, he criticizes attitudes that limit their understanding of the problem of nationhood to a purely constructed or theoretical phenomenon. Instead, he emphasizes the necessity to analyze the problem, its historical roots and its systematics. To overcome it, he proposes the paradigm of the Democratic Nation, which clarifies that, first and foremost, the aim of society is to develop morally and politically. The struggle to achieve this transformation, subsequently, involves women's liberation and developing an ecological way of life. It means overcoming the mentality of dividing everything into parts. Instead of the nation state, Abdullah Öcalan proposes the creation of a common life and self-administration for all ethnicities, religions and societal groups present in the region that, at the same time, offers everyone the opportunity to keep their autonomy and selfdefine their lives.

“The definition of a democratic nation that is not bound by rigid political boundaries, one language, culture, religion and interpretation of history, signifies plurality and communities as well as free and equal citizens existing together and in solidarity. The democratic nation allows the people to become a nation themselves, without resting on power and state, becoming a nation through much needed politicisation. It aims to prove that not only through politicisation but also, in the absence of becoming a state or acquiring power, a nation can be created with autonomous institutions in the social, diplomatic, and cultural spheres as well as in economy, law and self-defence, and thus build itself as a democratic nation.”

Abdullah Öcalan

Because women have been the strongest transformative force in the revolution and because their approach is very flexible and open-minded, they have managed to be the pioneers of overcoming national, ethnic, and religious boundaries. In North and East Syria the paradigm of the democratic nation is developing in practice. It was our struggle as YPJ that opened the way for this change. Inside the ranks of our forces, women from all kinds of religious and ethnic backgrounds take part, educate themselves about the paradigm of a democratic nation, and organize according to it. For many, this has meant great personal changes of attitude and has truly transformed the backward mindsets that we have all been raised with to some greater or lesser degree. Practically, this has become a reality today: a big part of the YPJ consists of Arabic women and women of Christian, Yazidi or other origins. They all organize in order to live out the truth of their own identities and to commonly struggle for freedom. We can see this in the brave personalities of young women today. They overcome the burdens of traditions and capitalist nationstates and create alternatives. We have met several of our friends in the YPJ who are going through this process. That have taken up roles in the self-defense of their common homeland, in units of heavy weapons, in operation forces, in the media, and in the organization of the revolutionary people's war. But first and foremost, they took on the responsibility to change themselves and society. To show this, we have interviewed four of them. Every one of them represents a part of the YPJ's lived reality and history.

1. My name is Axin Bahoz. I was born in 1999 in Tirbespiyê (Al-Qahtaniyah) to a family that comes from Iraq but moved to Syria many years ago. We are Muslims. Our tribe is the Igêdate. My mother died when I was a child, and I grew up with my father and my stepmother. Growing up, I saw a lot of violence against women, and this was very difficult for me. As it was still a tradition in Arab society, I was married off while still a minor. My husband and I got into fundamental disagreements because we did not love each other. After my husband was killed in an airstrike, I had to return to my own family. After some time, they wanted to marry me again to another man, but I couldn't agree to this. I ran away from home and joined the women's defense forces.

I faced so many difficulties growing up, because I was without my mother. I grew up exposed to the violence of my father and his second wife. I used to know a woman from the YPJ who was later martyred, and she would always speak about freedom and the importance of women's self-organisation. She also spoke about the meaning of true friendship and how it feels to live with so many women together in a women's organization, taking a stance and having an opinion. This is why I joined the YPJ in 2017 and attended my first education. My experience at this education strengthened my desire to stay with the YPJ, and in my first year of 2018 I changed very rapidly as I began to discover myself. In this environment, I developed a free opinion, developed willpower, and learned about my history. I analyzed the influence of society on my personality as a woman a lot, and the more I learned about myself the more I realized that there was still to learn. Seeing women take up arms and defend themselves had a great impact on me as a result.

The project of a democratic nation is fundamental for us as YPJ, and it is



“I JOINED THE YPJ TO LIBERATE MYSELF AND TO BE ABLE TO LIVE AS MY TRUE SELF.”

this project that has transformed our society. We are living together with friends with many different national identities. We are fighting together on the basis of the thought of Abdullah Öcalan, who developed the project of the democratic nation. We have truly become one. This is new for the YPJ and also for the society. Under the policies of nation-states, those in power try to make people hate each other. But as we became educated about the project of Abdullah Öcalan, we learned to feel, understand, and support each other. There are fighters from all over Kurdistan, Internationalists, Arabic, Syriac and Armenian members, and we are all struggling together and with each other in order to produce a society of free women. We struggle to ensure that women can gain their rights, that they can learn about the philosophy of a free life, and that we can communally live together. We also learn about each other's cultures. Sometimes we might have difficulties, but the biggest reason for this is that we do not properly analyze how the enemy is playing with our minds. As our education continued we finally understood some of these things. At first, we might have said, "How should we be able to live together?", but after some time, education and discussion, we saw that the project of democratic nation is excellent for us. There are difficulties, but with education, they can be overcome.

In our struggle as the YPJ there have been friends from all backgrounds that have truly influenced me. For example, Ruken Zerdest was a Yazidi woman who had a great influence on me. She believed a lot in our success. She thought a lot about the philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan and the freedom of women. When she talked about it, her eyes were sparkling and full of determination. She really believed in victory. She went to Afrin to struggle against the occupation forces. When she was martyred, she exploded herself in order not to fall into the hands of the enemy. I joined the YPJ to liberate myself and to be able to live as my true self. I look back

on the history of women, and today we can clearly see that our ideas are spreading among the women of the world. Today, women have gained an opinion, taken up weapons, fought, lived in equality and seen that real justice is within reach. Because we proved that these things are possible, thousands of women have joined the YPJ. The ones that came to the YPJ had the chance to free themselves from the hands of oppressive manhood and learn to be their true selves. This proved to all the world that women can do anything and that they are not condemned to a life at the service of some family. It was shown that women can live a free and just life. We could only reach this day because of Abdullah Öcalan's thoughts and the early struggles of the women's movement. The enemy wants to break women because they understand that women are the main backbone of society. But the struggle for women continues and has become even more intense than before. I have undoubtedly made mistakes, but in general, I have a great belief in this struggle and am convinced to go on and continue on this line no matter the difficulties. It is important for women to acquire this knowledge and act on it

Axîn Bahoz



“THIS KIND OF LIFE AND ETHICAL ATTITUDE HAVE ALWAYS ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF ARAB WOMEN.”

2. My name is Hêlîn. I grew up in Tirbespî in North and East Syria, but my family comes from Aleppo, which is the second-largest city in Syria. I joined the ranks of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) in 2016. My family didn't want me to do so. I think that the reason my father didn't want me to join the self-defense forces is because I am a woman, and this stems from the mentality of the society that we live in. This society is still immersed in the patriarchal mentality that has controlled us for thousands of years. My father wasn't angry in the same way when my two brothers joined the SDF. As I saw the development and the struggle of the YPJ and YPG and the lives of the fighters, I decided to join the ranks of the YPJ. I saw how fast the YPJ grew at the beginning of the revolution and the determination with which the women were struggling. The time of the Battle of Kobani influenced me a lot. The liberation of Kobani proved the capability of the YPJ fighters. We faced the largest terrorist organization, ISIS. I joined in battles, we had to use a variety of tactics. We struggled within the framework of legitimate self-defense. We were the first female army to confront ISIS. Between us as members of YPJ there is truly a strong friendship that binds us together in difficult times. This kind of life and ethical attitude have always attracted the attention of Arab women. Thanks to the women's movement and the Rojava Revolution, life was constantly changing, developing and opening up. The revolution also influenced the institution of the family itself. Relationships started to be built on mutual respect and appreciation because barriers that were created by the mentality of the state system were broken. I was curious to know the truth about the Kurdish people and why Abdullah Öcalan, the leader, was in prison. Why was Kurdistan not recognized globally? What is this libertarian, ecological and democratic model in Rojava? These and many other questions were looming in my mind, and I started to look for the answers to them. Today, I am interested to learn more about the thoughts of this movement because these thoughts are enough to build



Hêlîn

a bright future. This is truly what I was looking for, and I am still continuing to search. As we know, the YPJ is waging an international struggle and has become a society for itself, which includes Kurds, Arabs, Persians, Armenians, Turkmen and many others. Abdullah Öcalan stresses in his thoughts that women's freedom is the basis for building a free society, a free mentality and a future based on coexistence. Our revolution is the revolution of free women. We seek to create a strong fighting personality that will be a vanguard force and a free and just democratic society. Revolutionary women do not bend, no matter the cost, because women's character is one of will and strength. Abdullah Öcalan laid the foundation to the struggle of women to become revolutionary, warrior of freedom that cannot be shaken by the wind and rejects oppression.

I was asking myself: "what would my revolutionary personality be like? What is a free life?" This requires me to develop morals, a just personality and political knowledge. Life cannot be measured by an authoritarian mentality. Our lives require a spirit of responsibility and a scientific, philosophical and ethical approach.

Abdullah Öcalan proposes that we develop an intellectual and organized personality as women. We have to create our principles for life. It is the

approach of his philosophy that gives us trust and self-confidence to develop our personalities. It strengthened our effectiveness and ability to develop and liberate women from all traditions. This itself is a very beautiful struggle. The way to achieve change is through fundamental criticism of our backward personality traits that are formed by oppression. The project of a democratic nation is a project of a common life created by Abdullah Öcalan. It opposes all forms of oppression and the state itself. It is a solution to the Kurdish question by seeing it as a core issue of the democratization process in Syria in general. The Kurdish question is not separate from the Syrian issue. It would be difficult to solve the problems in Syria in general and for Syria to emerge from the current crisis without solving the Kurdish question. This leads Abdullah Öcalan to the concept of the Democratic Nation. The Democratic Nation represents a modern alternative within which society is formed. This is a nation based on diversity and its democratic self-administration, not limited by geography or language.

Abdullah Öcalan began his struggle for the freedom of the Kurdish people after they had been subjected to terrible injustice by the ruling regimes and states. As a result of his deep analysis of history and the region and by seeing the society of the Middle East, he understood that most people were oppressed, so his project became to embrace all peoples, not just the Kurds. The democratic nation, as a project that emerged from the philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan is a solution for the oppressed peoples and a solution to all the outstanding issues that the Middle East faces. For this reason, people followed his path. It has become clear that the project of the democratic nation is not welcomed by the capitalist forces and states because it struggles to free society from oppression. Consequently, it also stands in sharp opposition to colonialism. This is the reason why so many countries participated in the international conspiracy against Abdullah Öcalan, that led to his arrest on February 15, 1999. This complot was carried out by Turkey, but in the interest of capitalist forces that are afraid of the third line that his thoughts propose. The people of North and East Syria were able to implement the project of a democratic nation through democratic self-administration. An administration in which women participate equally, with the method of the co-chair system. Women organize themselves without a ruler or tyrant giving instructions. Arab women have been able to prove themselves in all areas of this revolution.

3. My name is Nûjîyan Amed Serdar. I was born in Shengal in 2001. I had two sisters and three brothers. I didn't go to school and only learned to read later, when I joined YPJ, because I wanted to read the books of Abdullah Öcalan. My family is connected to its homeland. Our tribe is the Habbaba tribe. They are very connected to the Yazidi religion. My family had a very dogmatic approach to religion and you couldn't criticize anything. It was a big contradiction to me that my family was so connected to religion while oppressing us so much. I was the oldest girl in the family and had to take care of the household chores. My family prepared me to be married off one day.

When the last Shengal genocide happened and ISIS attacked I got to know the HPG and YJA Star forces coming to help from the mountains. I was very influenced by them coming to the defense of Shengal and their approach to life. Their friendship and way of life seemed to be completely devoted to a search for freedom. There were two fighters named Amed and Nûjîyan, who visited my family many times. Their approach influenced me a lot. Their way of being friends was very appealing to me.

Amed Karawan played a huge role in the resistance of Shengal, even if he was a Turkmen and we were Yazidi. He knew our culture very well and was connected to it. This is why we valued him. He sometimes said "I am also Yazidi." He knew our religion and was just living with us. He was very curious. He said he was the son of Yazidi people. When he spoke to us he was always joking and full of joy for life in a way that influenced me a lot. He said your mothers and fathers are like mine and didn't see himself different from us. He said that we should never see ourselves as different from other people. He truly understood our culture and was loved a lot by

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our people because of his deep knowledge. He shared everything with us. I said to him: "Why would you just come here and live our culture?" He said it made no difference for him, since he was a child of these people. So I thought at this time that, if ever I would become a revolutionary, I would fulfill Amed's dreams of a free, just, and equal society. After he fell, I promised myself that I would one day fulfill this dream. After the genocide happened and so many of our people got massacred, I decided to join self-defense units. I based my decision on my love for the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan and the ones who fell in the struggle to defend our homeland. Amed and Nûjiyan also gave their lives in this defense, and I wanted to get revenge for them. It became my dream that one day I would be able to freely go to Amed in Bakur. When I joined YPJ it was on April 4, 2020. It was the birthday of Abdullah Öcalan. I am very happy to be a part of the YPJ because, in our organization, you get to know your own personality. YPJ is also a military force of women, and you learn to recognize how much strength you actually have. You learn about life and how you can gain the strength to live the right life. After joining the self-defense forces of the YPJ, I analyzed the contradictions that I had with my family. Getting to know the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan better and



Nûjiyan Amed Serdar

reading his books helped me a lot in this. I finally understood why my family approached me the way they did. Girls were not loved in their family, they were merely grown up and sent away. My family had demonstrated this approach. Even if I had taken on a great responsibility in my family, I never saw any respect. They still planned to

marry me off to someone and send me away. This was a great contradiction for me. Why did they approach me like this? Why did they see women as worthless? Why couldn't they see my progress and achievements? In the YPJ you learn to struggle against things that you are not able to struggle against in society. Furthermore, you struggle not only with your group, your friends, or your male comrades, but you mostly struggle with yourself. I lived a completely new life and saw a friendship I had never seen before. All of this is based on the philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan. I also got to know my strength and my bravery. I watched my own progress and learned to stand on my own two feet as a woman. Furthermore, I did not expect everything from my surroundings anymore. Also, I started to understand the enemy after I had survived the Shengal genocide. Our enemy is very brutal, but you do not really recognize its true nature while you live in society. After I joined the self-defense forces, I started to understand better. My conviction to seek revenge also grew. After I started to educate myself, I changed a lot. In the movement, you can analyze your roots and who you are. You know that as a woman fighter, you stand on your own two legs, and no one will pick you up. Abdullah Öcalan put a lot of faith in women struggling for freedom, and I wanted to gain this strength in my personality.

Our movement involves a lot of different people. While I was living in society, as Yazidi people we were on our own. We thought we couldn't live with people who believed in a different religion. We didn't agree with anyone outside our own culture. But if society sees the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan brought into practice, it realizes that everyone wants a free life. Connected by the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan, Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians and many others all came together. If it weren't for this, we wouldn't have gotten to know each other. As Yazidis we couldn't agree with Arabs before because, when the genocide happened, the attackers said they were acting in the name of Arab people. But if you live in our movement, people from every nation live together. Every one of those people who struggle together with us creates an opportunity for us to learn that we, as different nations or religions, can live together, be friends and struggle together. If war starts, we will, for example, always be fighting together, no matter from which nation we might be, and we will always sacrifice ourselves to catch a bullet in order not to hurt any of our comrades. The basis for this to be possible is the thought of Abdullah Öcalan and the strength we gained following the paths of the ones who gave their lives for this revolution. We always strive to implement their dreams. Only the struggle of the ones that came before us made it possible for us to reach the level of organization we have today.

The project of the Democratic Nation, our common life, has made me progress a lot. Before, I didn't believe I could live with anyone who isn't Yazidi. But when I came to the YPJ there was everyone, so I started to

learn. I stayed with Turkmen, Arab and Assyrian women. As I know my own culture, I should also know the cultures of others. Because when we came to YPJ we didn't only come for our own city but for the freedom of four parts of Kurdistan and the world. So for this reason, I am very curious about any nation in the YPJ and their culture. So now, whoever I will stay with, I don't see any difficulties. I want to know everyone, since everyone has a history and a reason why they are like they are. In our society, you don't have the chance to research a lot about the background of your religion or its approach to others. When I joined YPJ everything seemed so interesting in front of my eyes. Abdullah Öcalan, even if imprisoned in an isolation prison, never thought only about one nation. He thought about everyone, and now his thoughts have spread everywhere. This is why we also came from so many different places to YPJ. So everyone develops. When someone is thinking backwards and something bad happens, they directly say "This is because of the Kurds" or "This is because of Arabs". Some also deny their identity and do not live according to their own culture. For example, someone who is Arab would say they are Kurdish. This happens because they do not understand the truth of being an Arab or Kurd. Sometimes comrades would say "this is a Kurd; I can't live with her". But everyone should know their nation and religion, as well as the ones of the others, so that these things don't happen. If we accept the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan we are obligated to develop ourselves in these areas. As people and as movements, we have to develop. There should be adaptation to different religions and beliefs. When problems appear, the reason is that people don't know their own identities. As a Yazidi girl and a woman, the women's movement is very important to me.

The struggle for women's freedom made me progress a lot. It helped me to know the nature of my enemy and learn to struggle. On the other hand, our daily life as women together brings me a lot of joy, because we are organizing as women. When we are sitting together, maybe laughing and joking, I see how much strength and motivation you can gain from our communal life. At home, I had few friends because, in the family, you always had to take part in household work. You do not see your own strength in such a life. When I came to YPJ I got to know my strengths. I progressed a lot and learned how I could go and fight, or how you can play a vanguard role for your people. If you live communally and share everything—food, work and friendship—then you gain a lot from this. At first, I said, "How can you live like this". I had doubts about this life. But when you live this life, you see that in this way, you can struggle with yourself and live the right kind of friendship that leads to freedom. When you start to understand the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan, you start to understand how and what to struggle for. If you are knowledgeable, you wage the right struggle. If you do not educate yourself, you will not

know how to live this life. Life needs a big struggle. I learned a lot from this. How can I, as a woman, play a role in the self-defense war? Maybe until now I only took part in military operations but even seeing only an education and firing your first bullet, you see how much strength it gives you. Before, I didn't believe I would be able to do something like this, but the friendship that we share in the YPJ makes you believe that you can do anything. I changed a lot through these things, especially as a woman. How can you also struggle with male comrades? How can you build a strong friendship? In society, you do not live as communally. We are always together from breakfast to the evening. As a woman and a Yazidi woman, I see the women's guerilla as very inspiring. In our society and movement, there is a huge struggle for the freedom of culture and religion and a common life. This is possible because of the efforts of Abdullah Öcalan. For about three years, we have had no information about his situation. The enemy wants to create a barrier between us and his thoughts. But this is not possible because we have decided to struggle for the ideas of Abudllah Öcalan. If we are not successful in our struggle, this will also harm Abdullah Öcalan. What makes us continue is our belief in each other. No matter how many times our revolution might be under attack, we always find answers. We want to prepare ourselves even better as the YPJ to defend our homeland against occupation. You should study your enemy and its political reality very well. Because this project, the project of a democratic nation offers hope for humanity's future and is worth defending against any attacks.

“A WOMAN CAME AND PASSED A CHILD INTO THEIR HANDS, BUT THEY DIDN’T KNOW THAT ISIS PREPARED THIS CHILD AND SUDDENLY IT EXPLODED IN THE MIDDLE OF BOTH WOMEN, KILLING BOTH OF THEM INSTANTLY”

4. My name is Sozdar Kobane, and I was born in 2001 in the city of Sar-rin (Sirinê) in the south of Kobani. My family had a love for their home-land and was connected to it. So they participated in the revolution in North and East Syria. I decided to join the ranks of the Freedom Forces in 2017. My family wasn’t directly connected to any tribe. We are Arabs, and our religion is Islam, but my family isn't very connected to religion and is more modern and open. The economic situation of my family was normal—neither rich nor especially poor. They lived off their own work and efforts. Because I grew up away from the rest of my family with only my grandmother, she had the greatest influence on me. I rarely saw my mother and my father until I was about 12 or 13 years old, when I first went to stay with them. When I left to stay with my family, I saw a lot of things in their lives I couldn't agree with.

I started to oppose them, and after some years, I turned away and joined the ranks of the YPJ. When I came to join the YPJ I was finally able to analyze many of my experiences and start to struggle for a free life. For sure, some of our traditional or feudalist personality traits are resistant to change. But if we struggle to change, we are achieving this slowly, step by step. Especially with education, you change over time. If you stay together with other women from YPJ in difficult times, your friendship becomes a lot stronger. If you continue to deepen your knowledge, you progress.

Abdullah Öcalan has created a project for us, and we are now struggling on the basis of this project: the democratic nation means for us that we cannot make differences between each other. We are all equal. I myself saw this, that from whichever nation we are from or which language we might speak, we are joining together in this struggle. We live together

with any nation or language and commonly struggle for our homeland. It is our responsibility to learn each other's languages and cultures if we are living together. For sure, there are a lot of problems, but we are overcoming them. For us, difficulties are a possibility for progress because when we are struggling with them, we are progressing. We first need to understand the philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan very well and then bring it into our lives. To understand these things also means to put them into practice. This struggle is a continuous one and we are organizing as women in order to defend ourselves.

I have many memories, especially from when we fought ISIS. When we went to the last liberation offensive in Deir ez-Zor and ISIS surrendered, we had finally succeeded. There were the YPJ fighters Gûneş and Amara from Afrin, who were translating. A woman came and passed a child into their hands, but they didn't know that ISIS prepared this child and suddenly it exploded in the middle of both women, killing both of them instantly. To fight ISIS, to liberate our peoples was a struggle that took a lot of risk and sacrifices on our side. I have often lived for a long time with women who later gave their lives for the revolution.

In the YPJ we get to know ourselves, the reality of women, and how we can struggle in the movement. We analyzed the reality of women in society because there is a great difference in our lives. We struggle for humanity and a life of equality and freedom. I hope that all the women can get to know the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan. I hope that all the women can love their lives and develop true friendships with their surroundings and a good relationship with themselves. Abdullah Öcalan has shown the right way for us, and I walk on the line of Zîlan, the line of resistance and women organization. We are living a new life. We are struggling on this ground, and we will resist on this path.

Sozdar Kobanê



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