



# Cenî Info

June 2013

News on Women's Agenda by the Kurdish Women's Office for Peace

## Women Tents for Peace in Kurdistan

In April 2013, the Kurdish women's movement organized a range of meetings and passed the action plan to support the dialogue for peace and a sustainable democratization process in Turkey. This action plan will now be implemented step by step.

When the first Kurdish guerilla troops – among them units of the women guerilla group YJA Star – withdrew from Turkey on 12 May 2013 and headed to South Kurdistan, the Women Initiative had already erected 'Peace Tents' to accompany the withdrawal and prevent provocations by the Turkish military. This initiative was essential as the Turkish military continued to build military checkpoints and dams even after the withdrawal of the PKK was announced on 23 March 2013.

Even though there have not been any attacks so far, surveillance drones are circling over the border region and certain areas still being shelled. The Peace Tents, erected by the Free Democratic Women Movement in the regions Colemêrg (Hakkari), Dêrsim and Şirnex (Sirnak) are met with very positive reactions. Activists from the 'Peace Mothers' as well as women from different Kurdish and Turkish cities are holding out in the mountains day and night, despite freezing temperatures. Every day new visitors and delegations arrive to show their solidarity and discuss the peace process.

Emine Alkış, member of the Peace Mothers from Silopî explains: 'we have now been keeping watch for 10 days on the mountain Cudi. We hear the noise of the military planes all day long. We are here to fight for peace and tranquility, in order for Abdullah Öcalan and other political prisoners to be released. The Kurdish guerilla has retreated, now it's the Turkish army's turn to withdraw from our land. The soldiers' work here is done, they should withdraw into Turkish territory'. Her fellow campaigner Meliha Kabul adds: 'everyone should know that we are opposing any military action and will prevent soldiers from coming to the border. We will continue our fight for freedom and Kurdish identity'.

### **Soldier opens fire on female peace activist**

On 29 May 2013, Turkish soldiers tried to prevent women from moving their peace tent from the centre of Dersim to the village Roşnek (Alacık). Mem-

bers of the Free Democratic Women Movement were en route to Roşnek when they reached a military checkpoint between Nazimiye and Erzincan and were prohibited to drive on. When the activists got out of their vehicles to protest against these security measures, a soldier fired into the crowd. Luckily no one got killed or hurt. After this, the peace activists were unstoppable, got back in their vehicles and drove on – as planned – to Roşnek, where they built their tents. Later a group of representatives of the Women Initiative for Peace, the Peace Mothers, and artists of the Mesopotamian Culture Center went back to the military checkpoint and filed a charge against the soldier who fired the shots.



### **New Military base prevented**

In Colemêrg (Hakkari) an attempt by the Turkish army to build a new military base at the entrance of the village Dêzê (Kırıkdağ) has failed, due to the resolute opposition of the female activists. Together with nearby Peace Tent activists, members of the 'Peace Mothers,' the BDP and various NGOs broke down the newly built military checkpoint. The activists explain that the behaviour of the soldiers reminds them of the time when the emergency law was in place: 'if we want to visit someone who lives one street away, soldiers force us to show our IDs. We do not accept this. If the military does not stop to build this checkpoint we will intensify our democratic opposition.' One Peace Mother adds: 'they shouldn't think that we are not capable of defending ourselves. Our children left to join the guerilla forces but we are still here. We will fight to the end to defend our land and our rights.'

(Source, JinHa, 23 May; YOP 30 May)

# Women in West Kurdistan and Syria Between the Battle Lines

Despite the ongoing war, women in West Kurdistan and Syria managed to expand the reach of their organisations further. Apart from the women organisation Yekîtiya Star and the self-defence forces of the women YPJ who have established branches in all villages and cities of West Kurdistan, a number of social and cultural organisations have been founded locally. The main focus of these organisations is education, health and self-defence. Additionally, women from West Kurdistan participate in the activities of the Women Initiative of Syria, which was founded in March 2013. This organisation represents various national and religious groups in Syria. In May 2013, the Women Initiative of Syria organised a range of discussion panels in different cities in order to collect the demands of women for a democratic constitution. The chairwoman of the Initiative, Sîham Dawud said during one of the events in Rilmêlan:

‘we want the revolution in Syria to lead to fundamental change. One of our goals is to enshrine the rights of women into the Syrian constitution. The rights of women need to be guaranteed in all areas of life’.

During a meeting in Efrîn, members of the Women Initiative discussed the increasing violence against women in Syria. Regime forces and militias such as the *Al-Nusra* and the *Liva el Tevhid Brigades* increasingly rape, torture and kill women. On 27 May, 700 Kurdish civilians were kidnapped by armed government militias between Halep (Aleppo) and Efrîn. The civilians are kept hostage in a suburb of Halep, which is controlled by the *Liva el Tevhid Brigades*. The news agency ANHA reported that people are trapped in a basement and tortured with very little food and water.

(Source: ANHA, 17 May and 28 May; ANF, 28 May)

## New Women Alliances for Women’s Liberation in the Middle East

From 31 May – 2 June, a women conference will take place in Ahmed. Ayşe Gökkan, major of Nisêbîn (Nusaybin) and member of the committee explained to the news agency ANF that this conference is dedicated to the three female politicians who were killed in Paris on 9 January. The conference intends to create synergies between women in the Middle East in order to work towards liberation. This conference is needed to find common means of organization explains Gökkan: ‘women organizations have spread and developed widely in Kurdistan. The developments in Rojava (Southwest Kurdistan / Syria) can serve as models. In all wars and conflicts it is the women who are most affected by looting. In Rojava the mission of the women councils is clearly visible. Based on these new experiences we believe that we can influence those in power by advancing the organization of women and advance change and democratization’.

### Spring in the Middle East is male

Gökkan explains the current dynamics in the Middle East: ‘the changing dynamics in the Middle East are called ‘spring’. But it can’t be spring if women are not free. If women continue to be victims of rape and violence then this spring can only be for the men. Women in the Middle East oppose the term ‘Arab

Spring’. As long as women are not part of the executive and judicative, and participate in the drafting of a new constitution – this will not be a democratic solution’. Gökkan also emphasized that women always return to domestic duties after a revolution because so far sexism within societies has not been solved. Therefore, it is one of the main objectives of the Free Democratic Women Movement to avoid the retreat of women from public space but to give them leading roles in the Middle East.

### Women Conference is crucial for the peace process

It is not a coincidence that the first Women Conference in the Middle East takes place during the new peace process Abdullah Öcalan has called for during Newoz. Gökkan explains: ‘our conference plays a crucial role in the peace process. The dynamics of this women movement becomes more visible. During talks with women from Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Iran we found a consensus that no development in the Middle East can lead to freedom, as long as our calls for liberation are not unified. We have fought for women; we have made valuable experiences and made important progress. If we combine these experiences women can lead the path to freedom in the Middle East’. (Source: YOP 29 May)

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### Issued by:

Cenî – Kurdisches Frauenbüro für Frieden e.V. - Corneliusstr. 125 - 40215 Düsseldorf - Germany  
E-mail: [cenî\\_frauen@gmx.de](mailto:cenî_frauen@gmx.de) - <http://www.cenî-kurdistan.com>

Translated into English by Isabel Kaser, Peace in Kurdistan Campaign UK,  
[www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.wordpress.com](http://www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.wordpress.com)