

# Meeting with Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

London, Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> 2024



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## Who we are and what we want

In December 2023, more than 10 Kurdish political parties from Syria were invited to meet in Erbil, Kurdistan-Iraq, to agree on basic political principles. Among them were the two major Syrian-Kurdish parties and alliances, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council (KNC). After the PYD cancelled its participation in the meeting, the KNC also did. In fact, the PDK-Iraq representative, responsible for the Syrian Kurds, had spoken out against the meeting. As a result, only three parties came together: the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (party), the Kurdistan Democratic Movement - Syria and the Kurdistan Freedom Movement.

These three parties agreed on a joint political paper and decided to form a joint committee to coordinate their work. In the meantime, a fourth party, the Kurdiyati Movement in Syria, has joined the alliance and a fifth party has submitted an application which has not yet been decided upon.

Our idea is to build an independent party bloc that is committed to the interests of the Kurds of Syria. So far, we have the PYD bloc, which is a stooge of the Turkiye based PKK, it is fully dependent on it and cannot take any important decisions independently of the PKK. On the other side, there is the KNC. Just as the PYD, it is not independent, but it fully financially depends on the PDK-Iraq. This essentially determines its political orientation. We want to bring together the parties outside these two blocks in order to form a third, independent group.

Our detailed political vision is reflected in the joint political paper (see appendix 1). However, our most important demands are a democratic, federal Syria based on the rule of law and respect for human and minority rights.

## Our vision regarding the political process in Geneva

UN Resolution 2245 provides for a new constitution, a transitional government and election. However, none of these important goals could be implemented yet. There are several reasons for that – the most important is that the Syrian regime has no genuine interest in any form of dialogue. Moreover, and even though the resolution stresses that the political process should be exclusively Syrian, all major stakeholders are dependent on external actors pursuing their own interests. The Syrian government is dependent on Russia, the Arab opposition on Turkey and the Kurdish groups, as mentioned above, on the PKK or on Kurdistan Iraq. As a consequence, the Syrian conflict will not be solved without an inclusion of these stakeholders. Therefore,

1. The international Community needs to increase pressure on Russia and Turkey (and Iran) through the UN and their membership in the UN to commit to the UN Resolutions and constructively contribute to peace efforts. A new format should be institutionalized which recognizes the relevance of the Astana process, and includes actors such as the United States and the European Union (and selected member states). The key issue is to include all current internal and external actors and potential spoilers in constitutional debates in addition to discussions on security.
2. Moreover, an international peace conference, including the above mentioned actors, should be organized. It should focus on: (1) ending the violence across Syria and ensure immediate access for humanitarian aid; (2) decide a strict timeline with fixed deadlines for a constitutional process that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and constrained by key constitutional principles as agreed at the international conference; (3) strengthen the mandate of the UN to enforce and protect the peace agreement across Syria and oversee the transitional process.
3. The composition of any revived Constitutional Committee should be changed. It should be more representative of relevant political powers and expertise, and it should be more inclusive and provide for better representation of minorities and youth.

## Our vision regarding the situation in the Kurdish regions

According to recent studies, over 70% of the Kurdish population has fled from Efrîn and Serê Kaniyê. The conquest of the area by Turkey and its associated Arab militias was the main cause of flight. However, there are also major demographic changes in the traditionally Kurdish areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria (AANES). Here, over 50% of the Kurds have left their original regions. The main trigger was the policy of the AANEAS and the PYD/YPG, the political party dominating this administration: Forced recruitment, the abduction of children, a new school curriculum, which is internationally not accepted. Additionally, more and more farmers and landowners are giving up agriculture. They receive no support from the AANEAS, but the prices of fertilizers, seeds and petrol are steadily rising. Against this background,

1. The international community should put pressure on Türkiye and the Syrian opposition to withdraw their military and armed Arab militias from the areas they control in the Efrîn and Serê Kaniyê regions. Houses and land that have been expropriated since 2018 and 2019 should be inventoried, and their lawful owners should be identified. The lawful owners should be given back their estates, and the Arab families who have settled there should be compensated where appropriate. The longer this process is postponed, the more difficult it will be to implement. The international community should seek dialogue with Türkiye and the Syrian opposition on this issue. Their cooperation in resolving this issue should be made a condition for continued (financial) support for the Syrian opposition, especially for the Negotiating Committee.
2. In addition, the international community should urge the AANES to create living conditions in the areas it administers that prevent flight and allow people to return home. This includes the democratization of the region, which requires equal, free and secret elections. Kurds who have fled to Türkiye, Iraqî Kurdistan and Europe should be given the opportunity to participate in these elections and to help shape the local situation on the basis of the registration in 2011. Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press should be guaranteed, forced recruitment should stop, and the school system should be changed so that the school-leaving qualification obtained in Syria is internationally recognized. Additionally, the material living conditions in the autonomous region of North and East Syria should be improved. This includes the AANES subsidizing farmers to make their work profitable and produce affordable food locally. So far, a major part of the revenue from the Autonomous Administration has been used to fund the PKK rather than to develop the region. Any recognition of the AANES and any potential cooperation should be subject to the fulfilment of these conditions. An oil-for-food program (as in Kurdistan Iraq after the second Gulf War – may be a suitable mechanism to start cooperation, as it immediately benefits the population.
3. And lastly, the international community should support a new dialogue initiative between the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the KNC and, additionally, the group of independent Kurdish parties. Only by uniting all existing forces will it be possible to prevent the continued flight of Kurds from the region and to improve the situation there so that a significant number of refugees will return voluntarily.

## Document of understanding on the future of Syria

### A General principles

1. Syria is a federal, democratic state that applies the principle of secularism, respects the rule of law and adheres to the principle of separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers.
2. State authorities arise from the will of the people
3. The state respects human rights, the rights of women and children and complies with all relevant international agreements and conventions.
4. Powers and resources are distributed between the center and the regions in accordance with the Federal Constitution and other relevant laws
5. Ensure fair and genuine representation of all components in the Syrian parliament as well as in the regional parliaments.
6. Constitutionally recognizing the diversity of the population and recognizing all national, religious, confessional and linguistic components as essential parts of Syrian society.
7. All components, whether large or small, have the right to equal respect and protection of their rights, in addition to strengthening their cultural identity and equal participation in state affairs.
8. Syria consists of the following nationalities: Arabs, Kurds, Syrians, Assyrians, Turkmen, Circassians and Armenians.
9. The name of the state, the national flag, the national anthem and other symbols of the Syrian state shall take due account of the diversity of the population.
10. The Syrian parliament shall consist of two legislative chambers (bicameral system).

Citizens shall elect the members of the first chamber in a general, direct, free, equal and confidential election. The election shall take place following the principle of proportional representation. The regions shall serve as constituencies.

As far as the second chamber is concerned, each region shall be represented equally, regardless of its population size. As far as geographically dispersed groups such as the Syriac Assyrians, Armenians, Turkmen, Ismaili, Circassians and Yazidi are concerned, they are represented in this chamber by at least one member. The list of these groups may be expanded.

11. Decisions related to the responsibilities of the regions, the future of the components and general strategic projects in Syria require the approval of two-thirds of the members of the Second Chamber.
12. All people are equal before the law and are entitled to full protection.
13. Ethnic, religious, linguistic and sectarian groups, regardless of their place of residence, have the right to cultural self-determination, especially with regard to the education system and the practice of their own religious rituals, in accordance with the constitutional texts.
14. Arabic, Kurdish, Syriac and Turkmen are recognized in the federal constitution as official languages.
15. Arabic is the official language in the entire country. Regions have the right to have more than one official language.

16. Linguistic, national, religious and confessional pluralism shall be respected and recognized as a source of wealth for society and strength for the state.

17. A unified curriculum is adopted at the national level. The languages of the various national components are taught in addition to Arabic in the areas where they exist.

18. The state upholds political rights and freedom of expression and prohibits hate speech.

19. The state shall prohibit parties, political movements, organizations and associations that incite violence or hatred, regardless of their national, religious or ideological origin.

20. An independent electoral commission shall be appointed to plan, organize and supervise the conduct of the elections in close cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations.

21. The state is committed to a strong and diverse civil society.

22. The state is committed to safeguarding the common good and ensuring the highest possible level of social security, providing assistance to those in need and working to secure suitable employment opportunities for them.

23. Citizenship shall be restored to those deprived of it in the Jazira regions in accordance with the 1962 extraordinary census decree. Fair compensation shall be provided to those affected.

24. The effects of all Arabization processes, including the Arab belt are to be eliminated. Those affected are to be compensated adequately and those resettled are to be returned to their original places.

25. A woman married to a foreigner has the right to pass on her nationality to her children in accordance with the law.

26. The state and its regions implement all compatible international treaties and agreements signed by Syria before 2011.

27. Civil peace shall be preserved, the role of civil society organizations, trade unions and popular organizations shall be strengthened.

28. Violence, extremism and terrorism shall be rejected.

29. Women and men shall have equal rights. The representation of women in the various institutions and sectors of the federal state and the regions shall be at least 30 per cent.

30. Corruption shall be fought and an independent integrity commission shall be formed at central and regional level.

31. The right to litigation is guaranteed to all and there is no statute of limitations for war crimes, human rights violations and humanitarian crimes.

## **B Kurdish Affairs**

1. The Kurdish people's right to self-determination in Syria is a legitimate right in accordance with relevant international covenants and conventions, especially the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

2. The struggle of the Kurdish people in different parts of Kurdistan and all joint political endeavors and peaceful efforts away from violence, extremism and the politics of exclusivity shall be supported

3. The Kurdish-Kurdish dialogue is the only way to politically unify the positions of the Kurds of Syria.

4. Cooperation between different Kurdish organizations and parties shall be strengthened within the framework of non-interference in the internal affairs of other parts of Kurdistan. The Iraqi Kurdistan Region shall be considered a national asset for all Kurds.

5. It is necessary to find a common co-operation mechanism between the different groups and parties in Syrian Kurdistan and to create a political body to represent the Kurds in international forums.
6. A genuine and balanced representation of the Kurds in the Constitutional Committee and other legal committees needs to be ensured.
7. The existence of the Kurdistan Region of Syria shall be constitutionally recognized and considered as a single and integrated geographical entity, while redefining its administrative borders in cooperation with the federal government.
8. Syrian Kurdistan shall be placed under international protection and a new political-administrative system shall be built after holding democratic elections under international supervision.
9. Violations committed by armed groups and factions against the local population in the areas controlled by Turkey shall be condemned and documented. The administration of these areas shall be handed over to their original inhabitants.
10. The return of displaced Kurds to their original areas who were displaced due to the war and intensifying political efforts with various international bodies to provide the necessary financial support, help them secure their livelihoods, return their property, etc. They will be provided with a safe and suitable home.
11. A financial fund to support the return of displaced people to their areas shall be established.
12. The demographic change in Kurdistan-Syria must be stopped.
13. The authorities of the Autonomous Administration must abolish compulsory military service. The recruitment of minors, men and women, and their involvement in military operations must end immediately. This demand must be made a priority in the negotiations with the Autonomous Administration.
14. Human rights, the rights of women and children and compliance with relevant international agreements and conventions must be respected.
15. The rights of all national, ethnic, religious and sectarian minorities in the Kurdistan-Syria Region, including the freedom to study in the mother tongue and practice religious rituals, and the effective representation of these groups in the Region's parliament shall be constitutionally respected
16. All citizens of the Kurdistan Region of Syria have equal rights and duties before the law, and the rights of any citizen shall not be restricted, regardless of religion, denomination or national affiliation.
17. The sovereignty of neighboring countries shall be respected and there shall be no interference in the internal affairs of any neighboring region.
18. Archaeological sites shall be protected, and the return of all stolen antiquities shall be advocated for.
19. Young people and youth organizations shall be supported and trained to be capable of managing state institutions efficiently.
20. Environmental protection and promotion of reforestation shall be supported.

Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (party)

Kurdistan Democratic Movement - Syria

Kurdistan Freedom Movement

Kurdiyati Movement in Syria