

Statement on sexual violence and sexual discrimination

We, the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement, treat the struggle against five thousand years of male domination and all of the forms through which it finds expression, not as a secondary struggle, but as a primary one. Having concluded that the freedom of women is the freedom of society, we believe that a true freedom struggle must place women's freedom at its centre. To this end, the Kurdish freedom movement is not a national liberation movement in the classic sense, and it is also promoting the construction of an alternative system based on a democratic, ecological and feminist paradigm in opposition to five thousand years of male domination.

The KJK, the name taken by the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement's confederal system, has, in pursuit of ideological depth, adopted the basic approach of confronting the phenomenon of violence in all of its dimensions and tracing it to its roots to enable it to be combatted effectively. Violence in all of its manifestations as practised today – verbal, physical, structural, state violence, etc. – is a direct result of the masculinist mentality and its system. The same applies to all expressions of social sexism.

The vilest form taken by violence that derives and draws succour from the masculinist mentality is without doubt, sexual violence. It is well known that, over our forty-year struggle, the states (especially Turkey and Iran) that have colonised Kurdistan and gangs like ISIS against which we are fighting nowadays, have not refrained from using sexual violence as a weapon to subjugate both individuals and Kurdish society as a whole to. Sexual violence to this end is a systematic instrument of war of the colonial, occupying, masculinist, subjugating mentality that aims to crush the will and honour of the woman and, in her person, society and to break up the unity of body and mind. In contemplating sexual violence, we do not restrict ourselves to verbal or physical harassment and violation alone. Even a violating glance at a woman's body must be treated within the context of sexual violence. Rape is not to be understood as sexual violence alone, either. We, as the women's movement, also consider attacks mounted in a systematic manner against women's will, consciousness and conceptual and emotional world to be components of a 'culture of rape' and we have exposed and exhibited these through the social campaigns we have waged.

In our struggle against violence and social sexism, neither in the field of war nor in the civilian field do we embark on practical measures and social awareness raising work in isolation from one another. Just as practical measures do not suffice in the absence of struggle targeting both men and women aimed at eliminating the patriarchal mentality, so every ideological struggle must also possess tangible mechanisms. As to the mechanisms and measures that are developed, these are simultaneously both the result, and also the expression of the level attained by the women's movement. If a few examples are called for to illustrate this:

- Our movement possesses a democratic, ecological and feminist paradigm. All activists, whether female or male, are held to account in terms of their feminist credentials and strive to live up to such measurement.
- The women's movement is organised in a self-focussed and autonomous manner within the overall movement. It possesses its own decision-taking mechanisms. The involvement of women activists in activities of both a self-focussed and organisation-wide nature is

regulated by the women's movement. The female leadership at all levels is nominated by the women's movement.

- The principle of equal and joint participation is practised in organisation-wide activity. Women and men are included in equal numbers (50:50) in all leaderships and military commands. The co-chair system is employed at the top echelons. The women co-chairs express and represent the collective will of the women's movement.
- The women's movement defends and promotes the pioneering role of women on all areas of the struggle. It conducts intensive self-focussed training activities so as to develop the will and consciousness to enable women activists to effectively perform their pioneering mission within the organisation-wide struggle. Similarly, various measures are promoted in both military and political decision-taking mechanisms at all levels to enable women to make a powerful qualitative contribution alongside their equal quantitative contribution.
- The KJK rejects all manner of discrimination and violence directed against women and combats this in an effective manner. It treats violence against women as a crime and judges it in a clear and transparent manner developed on a unique and common ground.
- Should, in spite of all of the measures and awareness raising activities that have been put in place, instances of discrimination and sexism directed against women be experienced, notification is given of the matter in question by various means and methods (criticism/self-criticism at official meetings, reporting, oral application to leadership) and the crime committed is investigated and prosecuted according to its seriousness (self-criticism platform, self-criticism report, trial). Furthermore, the Court of Justice constitutes an institutional body to which all movement members may make recourse. As an autonomous structure, the Court of Justice operates with an approach to law and justice that is devoid of social sexism and accords with international standards and regional cultural values.
- All women activists involved in the movement submit individual written reports to the women's movement at regular intervals. It is also mentioned in the said reports, any difficulties encountered by activists in the arenas in which they are engaged. The women's movement, having assessed the reports, promotes measures to solve the problems that have been experienced on both an individual and collective level.
- The women's movement plays its role in overcoming social sexism and preventing violence on the civilian areas where it has influence. To this end, it fulfils its mission of giving life to the democratic, ecological and feminist paradigm in the structures organised in all four corners of Kurdistan and abroad, bringing about the equal participation of women on all areas and implementing the co-chair system. Accordingly, the co-chair system is employed at all of the municipalities controlled by the DBP in North Kurdistan, and the HDP contested the 2015 general elections with an equal number of women candidates, who attained a 40% representation in parliament. Similarly, in Rojava the co-chair system is employed in the canton prime-ministerhips. A large number of institutions have been created to counter violence against women. Women judges alone preside over trials involving women who have suffered violence and sexual discrimination.

- The women's self-defence force of the YJA-Star (women's guerrilla army) promotes actions to counter sexual violence in its broadest sense, especially prostitution and rape, in Kurdistan.
- The women's movement has adopted as a basic principle the development of women's self-defence in tandem with measures to counter violence against women and social sexism. For this purpose, training is also given to women to enable them to resist attacks against them by men, the state and organisations like DAESH.
- The KJK opens up a space for free living to civilian women who flee their homes on account of the violence they have suffered and take refuge in the mountains. It facilitates psychological assistance and provides the necessary support for them to take their lives forward of their own free will.

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