

Not One Step Back!

TQILA-IRPGF Communique

The Queer Insurrection and Liberation Army

August 3, 2017

The current social revolution in Rojava (Western Kurdistan – Syria) is one of the greatest beacons of militant self-organized and autonomous revolutionary praxis of the 21st Century. Within a brutal civil war in Syria that has cost upwards of half a million lives, the Kurdish peoples along with other ethnic groups including Ezidis, Arabs, Assyrians, Armenians, Turkmen and Circassians as well as foreigners from other countries outside the region, have stood up to the barbarity of both Bashar al-Assad and the theocratic totalitarianism of Daesh (ISIS) in order to create a democratic entity which transcends the archetypal nation-state.

Today, that nascent revolutionary experiment is threatened by not only Assad's forces and Daesh but also by the fascist forces of Turkey; the imperialist forces of the United States, NATO, Russia, Iran and China; the collusion of the Kurdish Regional Government (Iraq); and both internal and external counterrevolutionary, nationalist, bourgeois and rightist forces. The Kurdish revolutionary struggle and embryonic project of democratic confederalism in Rojava has been surrounded by barbaric, opportunist and imperialist forces which seek to extinguish this beacon of freedom and place the region once again under the yoke of capital and the Syrian nation-state. In the name of "sovereignty" and "unity", the imperialist forces use the Kurdish revolutionaries to achieve their regional and national interests and will eventually dispose of them to safeguard their regional alliances, economic interests and strategic positions. The regional and international powers seek the continued oppression, domination and exploitation of the Kurdish peoples in Iran, Turkey and Syria while supporting the KRG in Iraq and the Kurdish bourgeoisie since it serves the interests of capital and works with the imperialist and fascist forces. This proxy war, the possible beginning stages of a third world war, is of critical importance to revolutionaries everywhere.

We ruthlessly criticize the reactionary and counter-revolutionary positions of many "anti-imperialist" socialists and communists who have supported Assad in the name of "anti-imperialism" but fail to recognize Assad's savagery and brutality, having butchered and massacred hundreds of thousands of Syrians. Additionally, they fail to acknowledge Assad's collusion with Israel, Russia and the United States and his reactionary policies towards the Kurdish peoples and other minorities in Syria in addition to abandoning the Palestinian people's struggle. The dungeons of Syria have been and continue to be filled with thousands of our revolutionary comrades while the state crushes the workers movement. Even before the Syrian

Civil War broke out, Assad's socioeconomic policies were of advancing neoliberal reforms and dismantling the remaining welfare state structures that had existed under his father, Hafez al-Assad. We openly denounce those who support Assad's dictatorship which seeks to stifle the people's democracy, autonomy and revolution. We also criticize those who support the various religious factions and smaller groups at war with Assad which embody the most reactionary forces in the region. We find the forces of the PYD, the PKK and those allied with it to be the most progressive in the region and we recognize their fundamental revolutionary characteristics.

The fight for social autonomy, gender equality, direct democracy and worker controlled industries is at the heart of the project in Rojava and the goal for an autonomous Kurdistan. We recognize the struggle against all forms of kyriarchy and we support the ongoing revolution in the region. Like Chiapas, Rojava seeks to move beyond the traditional nation-state model that is the impetus behind most national liberation struggles. The PKK and Abdullah Öcalan have been self-critical of the need for a nation-state and have worked to transcend it.

We see the Rojava revolution as part of the larger revolutionary project of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK). We believe that the liberation of all four parts of Kurdistan under a model be it autonomous or democratic confederalist, will be necessary to end the continued genocide of the Kurdish peoples and other minorities in the region. We also believe that a revolution which is against nationalism and chauvinism and rooted in women's liberation, ecology and communalism, is necessary to combat the rise of nationalism, fascism and religious fundamentalism. Rojava is the laboratory and first step to the liberation of all of humanity. This is the revolutionary foundation by which anti-statist revolutionaries and anarchists can support the cause in Rojava which ultimately seeks to overcome this global paradigm.

In June 2015, various communist parties as well as an anarchist group from Greece announced the creation of the International Freedom Battalion to fight against Daesh and defend the revolution in Rojava while advancing the struggle for proletarian internationalism and revolutionary socialism.

The International Revolutionary People's Guerrilla Forces, a militant, horizontal, self-organized anarchist armed struggle collective, started to investigate the conflict and how it could best contribute to it. The IRPGF has comrades from both east and west, including ethnic Kurds, who identify with a variety of ethnic, gender and sexual communities. Our members self-identify as anarchists, anarcho-communists, anarcho-syndicalists, social anarchists, queer anarchists, anarcha-feminists, libertarian communists, libertarian socialists and anti-authoritarian marxists. Our unity, however, manifests itself in commitment to anarchist principles and values. As such, we recognized the importance of the struggle in Rojava as well as the broader struggle in Kurdistan, Turkey and the region and thus decided as a collective to join the struggle and create a permanent base in the region.

Since the public announcement of our existence and membership in the International Freedom Battalion in the Spring of 2017, our members have fought and continue to fight under our banner both in the Battle of Tabqa and in the Raqqa offensive. The IRPGF has since joined the management team of the International Freedom Battalion, serving alongside the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP), United Freedom Forces (BÖG) and The Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey (TİKKO) in an administrative and leadership capacity both politically and militarily. Anti-fascism and revolutionary internationalism continue to motivate us to fight alongside other guerrilla forces and the people's army in the popular struggle against fascism both from Daesh and from other enemy forces like the Turkish state.

Currently, IRPGF comrades are stationed in Raqqa and are participating with the IFB in operations against daesh, some having experienced heavy fighting, ambushes and encounters with mines, mortars, drones and suicide bombers. Our forces are not short term units but are preparing to stay in the region and be deployed abroad in support of social revolutions wherever they occur which is part of internationalist revolutionary solidarity. The IRPGF as a member organization of the International Freedom Battalion is directly under YPG command and by extension SDF command yet retains its autonomy.

On July 24th, 2017, the IRPGF announced the creation of The Queer Insurrection and Liberation Army (TQILA), a subgroup of the IRPGF. Queer anarchists in the IRPGF took the initiative to create the subgroup with the full support of the entire collective. The idea for a specific unit for gender and sexual minorities was born from the life long struggle of many of our comrades who are Middle Eastern Queers themselves. Some of us have roots in Kurdistan and others of us are from other parts of the Middle East. We have a very good understanding of gender and sexual minority struggles which are ongoing in the region. We believe as Queers from and currently in the Middle East that one of the most radical acts we can do is to announce our existence to people and governments who have and continue to claim that we do not exist. We exist and we fight against tyranny, oppression and domination with the people, who seeing us, have come to love us for who we are and not as a stereotype or something to be feared.

TQILA sees this as an opportunity to open up a critical dialogue amongst the revolutionary parties and guerrilla forces about gender and sexuality issues. Many of us have been in Rojava for quite some time and have seen the tremendous gains of the women's revolution going on in the region. We have been in the fight for Raqqa for many months and some of us have been here since Manbij. We believe that Queers should have a place in the fight. We are against oppression and domination, having experienced it all our lives as well. We believe that participating in this fight, people can see us not simply as an identity but as fellow revolutionaries and ultimately as people who are, like them, willing to risk our lives for liberation.

The openness of our members and their gsm identities have been very minor issues. In fact, while many of the hevals are at first a little taken aback or uncomfortable they quickly realize that our sexual or gender identities do not make us any different than them on the battlefield. We all bleed, sweat, smell and cry when we lose our hevals in the fight. We have seen a transformation underway both in the people's army, the guerrilla and the local population. It is a slow one but we have faith that the revolutionary forces, most especially the women of Kurdistan, will continue to advance the liberation struggle for all gender and sexual minorities.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has made enormous strides, guided by the theories of Abdullah Öcalan, on women's issues. For the PKK and especially for the Kurdistan Communities of Women (KJK) which is under the larger structure of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), the liberation of women is a fundamental and essential element of the social revolution and transformation of society in Kurdistan and beyond. Other parties that we are allied with like the Turkish Communist Party/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML), the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP), United Freedom Forces (BÖG) and the Maoist Communist Party (MKP) among others have progressive views on not only women's liberation but LGBT*QI+ issues. They even encourage them to join the guerrilla forces in the mountains. In civil society in Turkey, the People's Democratic Party (HDP) has made LGBT issues a cornerstone of its platform for social change and progress. The HDP currently is under extreme repression with its representatives in jail and many of its offices attacked by the fascist AKP-MHP forces under Erdoğan.

We recognize that large segments of the general population in the region, under the yoke of reactionary, feudal and conservative ideologies and mentalities are certainly not ready to even discuss women's issues, let alone queer ones. Even amongst the guerrilla, the topic can be taboo for some hevals. Certainly there are segments of Kurdish society which retain feudal and conservative attitudes towards gender and sexual minorities. Yet, there are sections of the society, and especially amongst the women of the Kurdish liberation movement, the YPJ and YJA Star, who are critically engaging in theories and analyses of sexuality and gender. For example, in the courses on Jineolojî, the new science of women developed by the PKK using the theories of Öcalan, gender is analyzed as a social construct using the theories of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. The fact that these theories are being analyzed and spoken about by one of the largest leftist guerrilla forces in the world, the PKK, in the midst of a revolution and war, is transformative and inspiring. We believe that Rojava is in the process of becoming a place that will be progressive enough to accept gender and sexual minorities if the revolution can survive the looming war with Turkey.

We would say to critics that the time of passivity, silence and oppression is over. Self-defense is a right and duty for our community and for others who are also facing oppression, domination and exploitation. In this time of right wing, nationalist and fascist resurgence, self-defense is not only a necessity but life itself. As the Kurds say, "berxwedan jiyane" or "resistance is life." Abdullah Öcalan speaks about "the principle of the rose" in regards to women's liberation. He says that the rose is beautiful but it has thorns to protect itself. Likewise, women must protect and defend themselves against both the state and patriarchal oppression. This has led to the creation of the all-female guerrilla force, the YJA Star in the mountains, the YPJ in Rojava and the YJŞ in Şengal. We believe that this principle also applies to gender and sexual minorities. We want peace but if attacked and continually repressed, like the rose, we have thorns and we will strike back. Our self-defense has given us new found strength and forged revolutionary bonds that are life long and will continue to nurture and enrich the struggle for liberation.

Our sexual identity and orientation defines a part of us but we are cognizant of local culture, religions and traditions. We are not flashy about our identities but it is a known fact that we ask other hevals to respect. It is a priority for the sole fact that the oppressive structures that seek to erase Queers are also simultaneously the ones that oppress women, workers, peasants, ethnic minorities et al. Our fight for liberation is tied with every oppressed groups fight for liberation. If one is in chains, all are in chains.

The announcement of TQILA was met with tremendous press coverage, beyond what we expected. The interest in the formation led to requests by various media outlets for interviews and exclusives. We issued statements to all the media outlets we spoke to that correspond to the majority of the aforementioned text you have read here. Yet, the media misrepresented not only TQILA but the IRPGF, the IFB and our relationship with YPG and the SDF. TQILA is in fact not a separate battalion or brigade but a subgroup of the IRPGF. As such, it is not registered with the SDF since the IRPGF already functions in the autonomous International Freedom Battalion as the fourth component of the management team which precedes the SDF's formation. The statement of the SDF is not inaccurate but highlights the complex relationship of units on the ground. To emphasize both TQILA and the IRPGF exist. Comrades of TQILA-IRPGF are currently fighting in Raqqa while others are training and working in Rojava. We will continue to have a permanent presence in Rojava and struggle so long as the revolution continues, advances and transforms the region in a liberatory way.

VICTORY TO THE REVOLUTION IN ROJAVA!

*VICTORY TO THE BARRICADES, THE SOCIAL INSURRECTION AND THE COMMUNE!
MILITANT HORIZONTAL SELF-ORGANIZED COLLECTIVES & COMMUNITIES
FOR THE REVOLUTION AND ANARCHISM!*

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