

The social revolution will sweep Turkey Kurdistan sooner or later

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Below is the outcome of my visit to Northern Kurdistan in Turkey between 02/11/14 to 08/11/14 as one of a delegation from United Kingdom, organised by Peace in Kurdistan Campaign (PIK), People's Democratic Party (HDP) and Democratic Society Congress (DTK).

Throughout the visit we had a chance to meet many organisations, including political parties, local and regional Trade Unions, co-Mayor of Diyarbakir and Suruc, the Coordination of humanitarian aid to the refugees, Refugees Camps, Villages at the border of Kobane, representatives of Democratic Free Movement of Women, Human Rights Association, representatives of democratic Region's Party, the Bar Association of Diyarbakir and finally meeting with the Federation of the Families of Detainees.

During our meeting with the people we had total freedom to ask the relevant questions about the situation, their responsibilities, their approach to the problems they are facing, and their current and future tasks.

There is no doubt that each of the above organisations was overloaded with work, shortage of funds, humanitarian aid and lack of support from the central government. These were because of the following reasons:

a – The war in Kobane had created a big problem in the region due to the overwhelming number of refugees from the city and by the Eyazidis from Shangal (Sinjar Province). This has created a big problem for each of the above departments.

b – The slow pace of the peace process between PKK and the Turkish government, which is nearly halted. This obviously made the people angry, frustrated and disappointed.

c – Continuing the war in Kobane has caused more killing and displacement of people, while there is no clear sign of defeating the Isis. There is evidence that the Turkish government is supporting Isis. These are reasons for more demonstration and protest and vicious response from the police that destabilises the situation further.

The most important observation in our visit is the fragmentation of organisations, and the formation of a variety of bodies in different places. A few of these were old but many had developed during the last couple of years. Each of them is working for progress of the society towards stability situation, peace, freedom, social justice, human rights, There was some signs of coordination among them.

Many of these bodies have been formed as a default and forced themselves over the situation and the central government. This is a reason for seeing some tension between them and the government. It is amazing to notice that while the Municipality of Diyarbakir is elected by the Kurdish people but has no contact with either the head of the police or the governor of Diyarbakir. This is the case with other departments. For instance, when we asked the Human Right Association whether they have written to the police about their behaviour and harassment of local people, they replied saying that "There is no point to write to them as they never answer us." There are many Kurdish schools but the state does not recognise them. The people however strongly support these and are confident that one day they can force the state to recognise them. It is interesting the people are defying and challenging the power and the state. There is a power within the power. There is "people's power" that people believe in, work with, have forced themselves through the actual state's power and have made it workable and powerful. This is the way for them to gradually take back the power from the elite minority. While this is not difficult in the cities that overwhelming majority are Kurdish and believe in changes. This is how the social revolution starts from the bottom of the society, and not from the top.

After 28 years of war, PKK has realised that they must change their direction of their struggles, their aims and their strategy otherwise their future won't be better than the future of other movements.

In my opinion PKK or at least the dominant faction or group within the PKK, has taken the right decision and the right direction by silencing their weapons and opening their minds, changing from military forces to people's power and from political revolution to social revolution. The wave of the social revolution is so strong it will be extremely hard for anybody or any political party to change its direction let alone to stop it. It became a culture, custom especially for the young generation, they have realised that is the only way to defy the power, to challenge the system and make major changes.

Through talking to people, they are so confident that they can make changes. In meeting Democratic Free Movement of Women, there were 9 women present. They told us how they deal with women's problem in the society, like domestic violence, rape and other abuses, how to support individuals in every ways to make them confident to tackle their problem. A few of them were talking about their own experience and told us since they joined the movement, in fact they have nearly become another person. They take part in women's peace camp, sharing mission, they discuss the books they read and working with Kobane democratic federation women. When we asked them whether there was a gay or lesbian groups in Diyarbakir? In reply they said "there are a couple of groups in the town, we have contacts with them and we are very supportive to them." It is amazing to see in a town like Diyarbakir there are women's movement with very brave and open minded individuals and are very supportive.

The Federation of the Families of Detainees (Tuhad-FED) is another group we had a couple of hours to meet with. This group was formed in 1996 under the nose of the government. It has 14 volunteers, half of them are women working tirelessly. Most of the foundation members of the group had very bitter experience of being in prison, as they were tortured or detained for a period of time. Its co-president of the federation is still held in prison. This federation is very active and has regular contact with the families and parents of the detainees. They support them by keeping in touch, finding a lawyer for the detainees and fund the families of the poor to visit their beloved ones in prison.

This group is in contact with the different groups abroad and locally with the Human Rights Association (IHD). In our meeting with the IHD, they confirmed that the police have arrested many people in the demonstration of 06/10 and 07/10/2014 against the Turkish authority. This was when many thousands fled from Kobane to Turkey against the wishes of the government. The demonstrations were against the silent policy of the state of Turkey supporting Isis. The head of IHD confirmed that just 5 minutes before our arrival, a couple of people came to their office to inform them that their sons, aged 16 and 17 years, have been taken away by the police. They were informed that during the demonstration 42 people and 2 police officers were killed, some 1128 people were arrested including 53 children, with 221 still in prison.

In a meeting with co-president of one of the Unions who works in a hospital, she confirmed the arrival of 128 injured and some very sick people at their hospital. The police have raided the Union office and the hospital a few times to find out whether anybody who helped the people at Kobane has been treated in the hospital. When they found the presence of sick and injured people from Kobane they harassed her and other nurses, abusing them verbally and taking their identity documents from them.

In our meeting with the Bar Association of Diyarbakir, we met 5 Lawyers. They told us that they have about 1000 lawyers in Kurdistan region working in different departments, caring for the rights of women and children or working at legal aid centres funded by the state. They confirmed that no major changes have taken place since the start of the peace process. They were optimistic and felt that the situation will improve by next year when the constitution changes. They pointed out that there was a bail system but this did not apply to people who were involved in politics and their case had to be settled in court. When we asked them about making complaints about the police behaviour, they replied "We do not think it is worth complaining because the police do not listen and they will not change their attitudes."

They confirmed that 2000 students were arrested and all over turkey some 3000 to 4000 people are still in prison This is in spite of the constitution which states that people should not be arrested for political activates or opinions. However, if one belongs to a certain political party or found carrying some sort of a banner or placard with slogans inciting hatred, he becomes liable to be arrested.

The plights of the refugees continue

Since the capture of Mosul, in Iraq, by Isis and the genocide of the Eyzidis and the start of war in Kobane, the Kurdistan region in Turkey is overwhelmed with refugees from both Kobane and Sinjar. More than 100,000 Eyazedis have fled, with many of them ending in Iraqi Kurdistan and some 18000 arriving in Turkey. There are also about 4000 of them staying in one of the camps just at the outskirts of Diyarbakir. The co- Mayor of Diyarbakir confirmed that there has been no support from UN. People in the region donated money towards the tents, food and clothes. He said "90% of the donation and help came to Diyarbakir Municipalities from the local people and only 10% from the state." He told us they work very hard to provide basic necessities of life such as tents, food, clothes, hot water, electricity, shower facilities, health clinic and schools to their children. He mentioned that they have great difficulties as all the services have to be done by volunteers; they do not have enough people. They also lacked skilled labour, doctors, nurses, beds, ambulances and medicine. The Turkish government does not support them in providing the services and everything has been organised by the Municipalities.

We also met with the Union of the South East Anatolian Region in which Gabb is in charge of the coordination of humanitarian aid to the refugees. This body consists of 286 members of which 30% are women. They elect 7 people to be part of the active committee. Half of their budget comes from all the Municipalities in the region and they have contacts abroad. Gabb told us that they have an intensive plan for the next 3 months to coordination between refugee camps, between the refugees from Kobane and Shangal and also with Turkey to obtain information and humanitarian support. They also have to classify the people in the camp in term of their gender, age, health and other problems. They confirmed that they supervise and support 9 camps of refugee in which 4 of them Eyazidis from Shangal. They confirmed that already around 6000 of them returned to Iraqi Kurdistan but received 96000 more who settled in Suruc, and 2840 in Mardin.

We also visited the refugee camp of Eyazidis where over 4000 people live. These people complained about quality of the food, hot water, doctors and nurses. They told us that due to lack of transport it takes 15 days to be referred to a hospital and moneyless refugees have to pay for their treatment.

In Surus, we visited the Kobane refugee camp which was set up on 15/09/14. They have the same facilities as the Shangal refugees. It looked they lived in reasonable condition. We were told that they have 15 doctors, 20 nurses and many more on call to look after them. It seems they are happier than the Shangal refugees, probably because of the following factors:

a – They are very close to Kobane, where they come from, as this psychologically influence them, compared to the Eyazidis from far away Shangal.

b – The Kobane refugees feel their stay is temporary and will returned home soon. Shanglys have little hope of returning while Isis are in control of their region.

c – The Kobane refugees had time to leave home and some managed to take their valuables with them. The Eyazidis, on the other hand were faced with immediate slaughter. They have left everything behind and many of their relatives were killed. hundreds of their women kidnapped by Isis and sold into sexual slavery following the raids is still unknown.

d – The refugees from Kobane left while there were still people behind fighting the Isis forces. The Eyazidis people are bitter towards Massoud Barzani's forces (The peshmarga), They informed us that as soon as the Isis arrived the Peshamrga withdrew and let the Eyazidis face slaughter. The withdrawal of the Peshamarga is a mystery and nobody knows whether it was on the order of Massoud Barzani, an agreement among Isis, the Turkish government and Barzani or something else. When we talked to people in the Eyazidis camp some of them did not hide their anger and frustration against Masoud Barzani's Peshmarga.

Turkish government has changed its tactic but not its strategy against Kurdish people

Everywhere there people had one thing in common: 'There has been no major change since the ceasefire of Dec 2012.' The suppression and the oppression are going on, still the Kurdish community is marginalised, still you can see a major difference between Kurdish and Turkish towns.

There is not much support from the governor of the cities or from the central government to Municipalities that are controlled by the Kurdish people. The Kurdish community suffers greatly from joblessness and from health problems. People still live in big fear either for their own safety or their children's being harassed, kidnapped or detained without reason.

It is true that the Kurdish people are now in control of their Municipalities, and setting up many organisations, association, Unions and a variety of groups. However, they receive very little or no help from the government. It is noticed that the Kurds have forced their case and the Turkish government has no choice but to accept it. This may be due to the government hoping to become an EU member. Also the Kurdish have simply rejected the old situation. They are prepared to fight back and do not want to stop their social revolution which is at its beginning.

Things can be happened but should not be happened to derail the social revolution

The situation is very tense and delicate. The peace process seems to have come to standstill. Kobane is still being seized, Isis is still a big threat to the region and it seems removing Assad from power is not possible for the time being. The US and the rest of the western countries can run out of a clear policy or strategy to defeat Isis and the Turkish government is not serious in the negotiation with PKK. These factors have direct or indirect impact on the situation in Turkey.

However, factors more important than the above which may derail the social revolution are:

a – Ending the ceasefire by PKK and returning to guerrilla war. This will be a disaster for Turkish society and the Kurdish community. No doubt this may bring more killing, more destruction, more displacement of people, creating the feeling of hatter between Kurds and Turks, increasing the wave of racism and will have a negative impact on the region as whole and the Kurdish region in Iraq, Iran and Syria in particular.

b – The attitude of US and the western countries treating the PKK as a terrorist organisation does not help the situation. Continuing such a policy will bring no benefits either to Kurdish people or to their allies in the region. These countries need to change their attitudes about PKK, they should understand that it is not the same organisation as it was in the 1990s. They should consider PKK as a main force in the region and is very popular. It has indeed changed and progressed considerably during the recent years. Therefore the PKK cannot be marginalised. The US and the western countries should force the Turkish government not to take the ceasefire for granted, they should all grab this opportunity to end this very long dispute.

c – The Turkish government has doubtful relations with Isis and the other terrorist organisations in the region. For instance it uses them in a proxy war which may become extremely harmful to Turkey. The president of Turkey, Mr Tayyip Erdogan, and its government should leave behind their dream of establishing the old Ottoman Empire in the Twenty first century. Instead they should concentrate on its internal problems, especially the Kurdish issue.

d- There is still a big struggle between the military Generals and politicians in Turkey over power. The peace process has never been in the interest of the military Generals. Although currently the struggle is getting less effective, the intervention from spy networks within the region along with the US and the western countries could revive this struggle and strengthen the Generals to do a military kudeta . This obviously is not in the interest of the peace process and the social revolution by bringing back the old polices of suppression, oppression and killing innocent people and to return to the first square.

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