



Situation Report

**STOP WAR
AGAINST KURDS**

**Stand for Peace, Justice, and Freedom
Solidarity with the Kurdish People**



January 20, 2026

SAVE ROJAVA – KURDISTAN

Situation Report: Stop War Against the Kurds

The Transitional Government in Damascus, dominated by members of the former al-Qaida affiliate Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), is once again using violence to consolidate control over all of Syria. This has initiated a new war of choice that threatens to return the country to the darkest days of its civil war and poses a serious threat to international stability. The campaign is being coordinated by the jihadist regime in Damascus in conjunction with Turkish Defence Minister Yaşar Güler and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. The Turkish state is playing an active role in the conflict, employing fighter jets, drones, and reconnaissance aircraft, and has reportedly deployed its own soldiers to fight alongside jihadist forces.

By contrast, since their fight against IS, the Kurds in Syria have consistently expressed openness to dialogue with the Syrian government. They have never sought the division or secession of Syria, instead advocating for inclusion within a decentralised Syrian state.

The clear objective of the war of annihilation against the Kurds is to hand Syria over from the Baath dictatorship to the HTS dictatorship following the international recognition of Al Jolani (jihadist nom de guerre of Ahmed al Sharaa) as a statesman. Al Jolani's vision for the new Syria does not include democracy or peace between nations. Women will continue to be treated as slaves. In opposition to this dictatorial concept of power, the Kurds have established a political and administrative self-government over the last 15 years, enabling women, nations and religions to express themselves freely. Therefore, there should be no place for the Kurds in Syria under Al Jolani. Genocide is once again being imposed on the Kurds to this end. Once again, the states in the international coalition against IS have demonstrated their hypocrisy. When their own interests are at stake, they not only forget their values, they also disregard international law.

Background and Introduction

Since 6 January, large-scale attacks have been carried out against Kurdish communities in Syria by forces of the Syrian Transitional Government (STG), in collaboration with jihadist groups and Turkish-backed militias. Beginning in Aleppo, these attacks have amounted to attempts at ethnic cleansing, resulting in the massacre of Kurdish civilians and the forced displacement of thousands.

Over the past year, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) has undertaken multiple rounds of negotiations with the Syrian Transitional Government, seeking a democratic solution and the establishment of a decentralised system of governance that reflects Syria's ethnic and religious diversity.

By 4 January, negotiations had reached an advanced stage, with the involved actors reportedly close to a tentative agreement. However, before any public announcement could be made, the process was abruptly terminated by the Syrian Foreign Minister, who maintains close ties with Turkey. On 6 January, following a meeting in Paris facilitated by the United States, Syria and Israel announced that they had reached an agreement. That same afternoon, STG forces—including Turkish-backed militias that have since been incorporated into the Syrian army—launched attacks on Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo.

In the days that followed, despite the declaration of multiple ceasefires, STG forces and their allies continued to advance towards North and Eastern Syria (Rojava), creating an existential threat to Kurds and other communities in the region, as well as to the system of autonomous, democratic self-governance established there. These attacks endanger the achievements of the Rojava Revolution, including struggles for women's liberation, peaceful coexistence among peoples, and democratic self-governance. The silence of the international coalition and other state and international actors amounts to complicity in the violence being carried out by al-Sharaa's forces on the ground.

Thousands of Kurds, especially Kurdish women and youth, have responded to the call for general mobilisation, streaming into Rojava to join the resistance or organising in cities across the region and across the world. This report provides an overview of recent developments, documents human rights violations and potential war crimes, international reactions and mobilisations, and concludes with key demands. As it is still a developing situation, more information is likely to come in the next days.

Ethnic Cleansing in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh, Aleppo

In late December, the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh were placed under siege, with petrol, food, and other essential goods blocked from entering. On 6 January, STG forces launched a

large-scale attack on these neighbourhoods using heavy weaponry. Several of the divisions involved were composed of fighters affiliated with Turkish-backed militias and Islamist groups that have previously been implicated in serious human rights violations and war crimes, including massacres of Alawite and Druze civilians earlier this year. Additional documentation suggests that reinforcements from Turkey were also present.

Under the terms of the 1 April agreement, no Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) units were present in these neighbourhoods. Their defence was carried out solely by local Internal Security Forces (Asayish), composed of residents armed only with light weapons.

On 9 January, one of the heaviest days of fighting, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen met with al-Sharaa in Damascus and pledged €620 million for the reconstruction of Syria. This decision was widely criticised as a tacit endorsement of ongoing human rights violations and as contrary to EU principles, raising serious concerns about the use and monitoring of these funds.

On 11 January, a ceasefire mediated by the United States led to the evacuation of many civilians and wounded individuals through humanitarian corridors, as well as the withdrawal of Asayish forces from the neighbourhoods. However, humanitarian organisations—including the UN and the Kurdish Red Crescent—reported significant restrictions on access to the affected areas. Dozens of civilians were killed, hundreds remain missing, and approximately 150,000 people were displaced. Reports also indicate torture and other acts that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by STG forces against civilians.

Following the ceasefire, serious concerns persisted regarding its implementation. Access for journalists and civil society actors was frequently denied, making independent assessment of violations extremely difficult. Reports of continued attacks on Kurdish residents and infrastructure emerged, alongside widespread looting of Kurdish homes and businesses. Tens of thousands of civilians remain displaced. The prolonged siege and extensive destruction have produced a severe humanitarian crisis, marked by shortages of food, diesel, and essential fuels, the closure of schools and hospitals, and chronic shortages of medical supplies.

Further attacks, attempts to provoke all-out war

On 13 January, after amassing its forces, the Syrian Transitional Government declared two additional regions governed by DAANES to be “closed military zones” and initiated a sustained military campaign advancing northward and eastward, involving Turkish drones and jihadist armed groups.

On 16 January, al Sharaa issued a decree granting limited rights to Kurds while simultaneously intensifying military bombardments of SDF-controlled areas. This decree—lacking constitutional status—appears aimed at appeasing Western criticism rather than enacting meaningful reform. That same day, as attacks escalated, the United States mediated another ceasefire, under which the SDF agreed to withdraw from the two targeted areas. Before the withdrawal was completed, STG forces once again violated the ceasefire, ambushing retreating troops and launching attacks in areas not covered by the agreement.

In the following days, further diplomatic efforts sought to prevent the outbreak of a full-scale civil war. SDF Commander Mazloum Abdi met with U.S. Ambassador Tom Barrack and leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Erbil. On 18 January, fighting intensified, even as al Sharaa announced a “permanent ceasefire” and plans to integrate the Kurdish regions of North and East Syria into a centralised Syrian state. Both DAANES, and later the Kurdistan National Congress, call for a general national mobilisation of the Kurdish people to defend Rojava Kurdistan.

In an address on the 18th of January, General Mazloum Abdi summed up the situation well in a few short words: “We did not want this war, it was imposed on us”, but that “we will defend the gains of our revolution will all means available.”

On 19 January, fighting spread across much of North and East Syria. STG forces and allied jihadist militias attacked the Al-Shadadi prison, releasing thousands of ISIS detainees. The International Coalition Against ISIS did not intervene, leaving SDF forces isolated and surrounded as they defended the facility, resulting in numerous fighters killed or wounded. At the same time, STG forces—jihadist militias, and Turkish-backed factions—launched an assault on Kobane. Kobane, the site of the historic 2015 resistance against ISIS, is once again under attack by essentially the same forces, now operating under different banners.



Image Description: fighting outside of al Shabadi Prison, before STG/ISIS fighters released ISIS prisoners detained inside.

Human Rights Violations and Potential War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity

Since the onset of fighting, consistent reports have documented human rights violations and actions by the STG and its allied militias that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh were subjected to systematic abuses, including indiscriminate shelling, a suffocating siege, and direct assaults on civilians, deepening the humanitarian crisis and fostering widespread fear and instability. Between 8 and 10 January, Khalid Fajr Hospital was repeatedly targeted by STG forces using artillery and mortars while patients and wounded individuals were inside. Reports document the killing of women and children, the desecration of the bodies of Kurdish Internal Security Forces—including the throwing of a Kurdish woman’s body from a fourth-floor building—and the burning of at least 19 bodies. Videos have been repeatedly shared of Kurdish women taken captive by forces affiliated with the STG, in which it is said the women will be given as a ‘gift’ to one of the commanders. Large numbers of Kurdish residents, including entire families, remain missing. Humanitarian organisations, including the Kurdish Red Crescent, were repeatedly denied access to affected areas. Tens of thousands of civilians have been forcibly displaced to other cities, in many cases multiple times as attacks expanded.

Attacks on civilian infrastructure of this nature may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity under Articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute, including indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against civilian populations, persecution on ethnic or national grounds, and forced displacement. Responsibility lies not only with individual perpetrators but also with the authorities that ordered, enabled, armed, and supported these actions.

International Reaction and Mobilization

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has expressed grave concern over the situation in Aleppo, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a return to dialogue. While some national and regional institutions have begun to discuss the crisis and take limited supportive actions, a profound silence persists within the broader international community—particularly from the International Coalition against ISIS.

Across all parts of Kurdistan and internationally, thousands have mobilised in solidarity with Rojava and in condemnation of those responsible for the attacks. Throughout Europe and South America, social movements, trade unions, civil society organisations, and academic communities have organised actions in support of the peoples of Rojava. The Kurdish people, and especially Kurdish women and youth have responded to the call for general mobilisation, with mass demonstrations, and hundreds if not thousands travelling to Rojava to help defend the territory. On the 20th of January, a march from Sulimaniyah (Iraqi Kurdistan) to Rojava was announced. In Amed, Hewler, Sulimaniyah—but also Berlin, Strasbourg,

Switzerland and Paris—mass demonstrations were organised, and the unity and resistant spirit of the Kurdish was once again shown to the world.



Image Description: scenes of the Kurdish community mobilising in defense of Rojava

Demands:

In this context, silence constitutes complicity. Through their inaction, the international coalition and the European Union have betrayed both their stated values and the Kurdish people. This silence has enabled policies of ethnic cleansing and risks paving the way toward genocide against Kurds in Syria. For these reasons, we call for:

- Immediate sanctions on the Syrian Transitional Government and condemnation from the international community.
- Immediate sanctions on Turkey for its role in attacks against Kurds in Syria and condemnation from the international community. .
- The EU to politically and legally recognise DAANES, compelling Damascus to accept a decentralised solution that guarantees the existence and rights of Alawites, Druze, Yezidis, Assyrians, Armenians, and all ethnic and religious communities in a future democratic Syria.
- The European Commission to withhold the €620 million in aid until the al-Sharaa government meets clear standards for de-escalation, democracy, and peace.
- The EU to establish an independent commission to ensure accountability for all individuals implicated in crimes against civilians, including those responsible for shelling hospitals and residential areas.

Finally: A democratic Syria could lead to stability in the region, and the first step should be the legal and political recognitions of DAANES. This would also help end the Turkish government's policy of escalation and violence against the Kurdish people. The establishment of democracy through DAANES, following the heroic struggle for liberation against the global threat of ISIS, is the only guarantee for the liberation of all people in Syria, especially women.