

# ROJAVA: WOMEN'S LIBERATION



## THE KURDISH WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

In Rojava today, and in Turkey before the repression following the 2016 attempted coup, Kurdish feminists have established the basis for a level of social, political and military power that would have been considered remarkable in a European social democracy and is nothing short of astounding in a Middle Eastern war zone emerging from a dictatorship.

Kurdish feminists have established 40-percent quotas in civil society and official organizations, as well as a system of co-chairs—one of whom must be a woman—in all social and political organizations. Their program emphasizes combatting violence against women, forced marriage and child marriage, and setting up special cooperatives to integrate women into the economy. To defend these accomplishments against the threat of ISIS and Turkish military, Kurdish feminists have developed their own military force.

How did they achieve all this in such a short time? Through a systematic approach that combines self-defense, education, programs and organization.

## SELF-DEFENSE

The Kurdish women's liberation movement began within the PKK when, in 1995, women formed their own regiment so that men could no longer patronize them or send them to the back of the lines. Due to the historical state violence against the state-less nation of Kurds, self-defense has been a fundamental principle to address issues of unequal power and resistance to violence.

The ultimate objective of the movement is to establish peace in the Middle East and beyond. Until this peace is established, self-defense is critical to sustain the feminist radical democracy practiced in the region, which is under the threat of hostile powers.



“We believe that women’s liberation is a central pillar in tackling all structures of oppression.” -Kongreya Star

## EDUCATION

The Kurdish freedom movement has set up special academies to study *jineology* (jin means “women”) or women’s social science as a means to reconcile the fact that every intellectual discipline has been shaped by men and we cannot even know what a social science based on female experience will be like until we develop it. Gender is taught in every educational setting, from primary school to courses for rural women to basic training in the army.

## PROGRAMS

The movement has developed programs to draw women out of enforced domestic seclusion and into social, political and economic life. These include cooperative workshops that enable village women to earn money, as well as *jineology* academies, health clinics, and even a women-only village in Rojava for widows or other women who want to live outside a patriarchal setting.

## ORGANIZATION

To ensure that women’s ideas and leadership are respected, every decision-making body has a parallel women-only unit. Communes are the building blocks of Rojava’s self-administration, and each has a parallel women’s commune with ultimate authority over decisions affecting women. Similarly, HDP electoral campaigns in Turkey must have 40-percent women candidates; these are chosen by women party members only, to ensure that they are not tokens. It has taken intense struggle to develop such policies to strengthen women’s leadership, and the struggle continues.

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