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Joint statement on the violation of human rights in north-east Syria

We, the undersigned organizations, have received information from locals and community leaders in north-east Syria informing us of systematic human rights violations directed against vulnerable communities.

The area in question is under the self-proclaimed rule of the Syrian Kurdish political party Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD) and is under the military control of its armed wing, the YPG.

These human rights violations are primarily directed at those communities, groups and parties that have not fully embraced PYD rule. They have taken a disproportionate toll on the Assyrian people.

The systematic violations are multifaceted in their nature. We chose to focus on three key issues in this statement.

Illegal seizure of property

The self-proclaimed autonomous administration controlled by the PYD issued a decree on 15 September announcing its intention to seize the property and belongings of persons who are no longer in the area it controls. If implemented, this decision will affect Assyrians and other minority groups severely. The arbitrary confiscation of property runs contrary to the same international human rights standards that the self-proclaimed administration has staked its reputation on upholding.

Forced enlistment in armed forces

The self-proclaimed administration has on several occasions directed its armed forces to forcibly conscript members of the Assyrian community for military service in the YPG. This has caused many young Assyrian men to flee the area, further draining the human resources of this beleaguered community and creating fear and suspicion.

Threats, pressure and targeted killings

Threats and pressure are also directed towards minority institutions and leaders who refuse to submit to the will of the self-proclaimed autonomous administration. The attempt by Assyrians to organize their own security to provide for the needs of their community following the withdrawal of government forces from Khabur has been met with pressure and even hostility, attested to by various eye-witness accounts, by the PYD and YPG. David Jindo, commander of a local Assyrian self-defence force in the Khabur area, was killed by assailants known to be members of the YPG militia on 22 April of this year, and his colleague Elias Nasser was badly injured and left for dead in the same attack.

Our concerns have been relayed to representatives of the PYD on several occasions, most notably during a meeting held in Brussels on 28 July between our representatives and PYD representatives, including Saleh



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Muslim, the co-chair of the PYD.

It is with great sorrow and anxiety that we witness the PYD's aggressive policies towards Assyrians and other minorities, especially given the lofty ideals that accompanied the declaration of the self-proclaimed autonomous administration by the PYD in late 2013. Prominent among these ideals was the granting of not merely religious but ethnic rights, an aversion to tyranny and coercive centralized authority, and an emphatically expressed belief that communities should be allowed to develop their own administrations in line with their own needs. These principles were intended to justify the consolidation of Kurdish dominion in Hassakeh and convince non-Kurdish communities of the democratic nature of the PYD.

We denounce the continued attempts of the PYD to divide and rule the Assyrians in Syria. By financing and propping up certain individuals and groups like the Assyrian SUP party and its armed wing the MFS, the PYD attempts to give the impression to the world that it has established good relations with all of the Assyrians in the areas it controls, and not merely with the political and military groups directly under its control. Events and testimony have made it clear that the picture is significantly more complicated.

Criticism of the actions of the PYD has come not only from Assyrian organizations and other groups focused on the Middle East, but also from respected international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and, most recently, Amnesty International.

We call on the international community, leaders, journalists and human rights organizations to hold the PYD to account for its actions. In particular, we call upon the government of the United States of America, as the main supporter of the PYD, to look into the treatment of Assyrians and other vulnerable populations by its partner on the ground.

The Assyrian federation of Germany and Middle Europe
The Assyrian federation of Belgium
The Assyrian federation of Sweden
The Assyrian American National Federation
The Assyrian Australian National Federation
The Assyrian Federation of U.K

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