

Call to Boycott Turkish Government Sponsored Academic and Cultural Institutions

We call on academics, artists and intellectuals around the world to oppose the Turkish invasion of northeastern Syria by boycotting Turkish government sponsored academic, artistic and musical events taking place inside and outside of Turkey.

Background to the Call to Academic and Cultural Boycott

The Turkish state's invasion of northeastern Syria has brought a dangerous state of war to the only relatively stable region in the country, threatening the lives of thousands with indiscriminate shelling, mass displacement and continuous bombardment. The Turkish attack threatens to do enormous, perhaps irreversible, damage to international standards of law, human rights and human freedom. It also threatens to destroy a unique experiment in feminist social transformation.

Sadly, there have been numerous cases of invading armies committing war crimes over the last century; but it is rare indeed for the commander to openly declare ethnic cleansing and war crimes as the main objective of his military operation and for the "international community" to respond with almost universal silence—or even support. This is a direct and explicit attempt to change the rules on the ground.

Turkish President R. T. Erdoğan has stated explicitly and repeatedly that it is his intention to militarily ethnically cleanse the Kurdish population of over one million people that live in an arc across the Turkish border from Kobane to Derik and to replace that population with members of different ethnic groups. One year ago, similar declarations were made before invading Afrin, another Kurdish-majority region in Syria. Since then, the originally 95 percent Kurdish population of Afrin has been reduced to a minority, with thousands killed or driven from their homes and the Kurdish language banned in schools. The municipality is now governed by jihadist groups backed by Turkey.

In other words, Erdoğan has declared his intention to violate three different key principles of international law clearly established in the Geneva Conventions and Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunals: 1. the crime of aggression, 2. the crime of ethnic cleansing, 3. the crime of resettling populations in conquered territory—even now his forces are using NATO-supplied weaponry to illegally bomb churches, hospitals, cultural monuments and civilian infrastructure.

Despite all this, the UN security council has failed to condemn the invasion and most national governments have taken no practical steps to stop it. This could be the end of the Nuremberg Principles, which, although often violated in practice, were at least recognized by all international actors as the principles that should govern military conflicts. Acts previously considered outrageous, even genocidal, risk being normalized.

What has been happening in Rojava for the last seven years—the attempt to create a society based on bottom-up, direct democracy, the liberation of women, and ecological principles as essential to any conception of human liberation—is, ultimately, the real threat to authoritarians

like Erdogan, indeed, to authoritarians everywhere, and the real basis for their endless talk of “security concerns.” Anyone who dares attempt an experiment that puts women at the heart of the liberation process must be punished so severely that no one will even think about doing it again. We, the undersigned, must object. The Rojava experiment may be imperfect in a number of ways, as any such experiment must be, but it holds out the prospect of changing the game and creating new rights and freedoms rather than robbing us of what little freedom we have. It is important to humanity everywhere that such spaces of hope are preserved.

After almost a week of Turkish state occupation, the region faces more uncertainties than ever before. Under these circumstances we call on the international academy to clearly state their committed opposition to the occupation and their solidarity with peoples of Rojava.

Implementation of the Boycott

One of the goals of this call is to encourage dialogue about human rights grounded in a set of shared principles. To this end, our call is directed to academic and cultural institutions. The boycott we are calling for does not preclude communication and collaboration with individual Turkish scholars or democratic institutions/journals. Turkish scholars will be welcome to attend academic events, using institutional funding to do where appropriate, to publish in academic journals and to take part in other activities as individuals.

This is also a call for cultural workers and cultural organizations to boycott events, activities, agreements or projects involving Turkish government or government-funded cultural institutions. International venues and festivals are asked to reject funding and any form of sponsorship from the Turkish government.

This is also a call for people to actively promote the ideas embodied by Rojava. As such, the signatories commit themselves to stimulating transnational intellectual and public awareness of and sensitivity to the situation in northeastern Syria/Rojava by organizing concerted on- and off-campus teach-ins, panels, vigils, concerts, art exhibits, etc., as well as developing solidarity networks and joint-action campaigns with existing academic and public initiatives that target processes of neo-imperialism, settler colonialism, racism, militarism and sexism in various contexts.

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