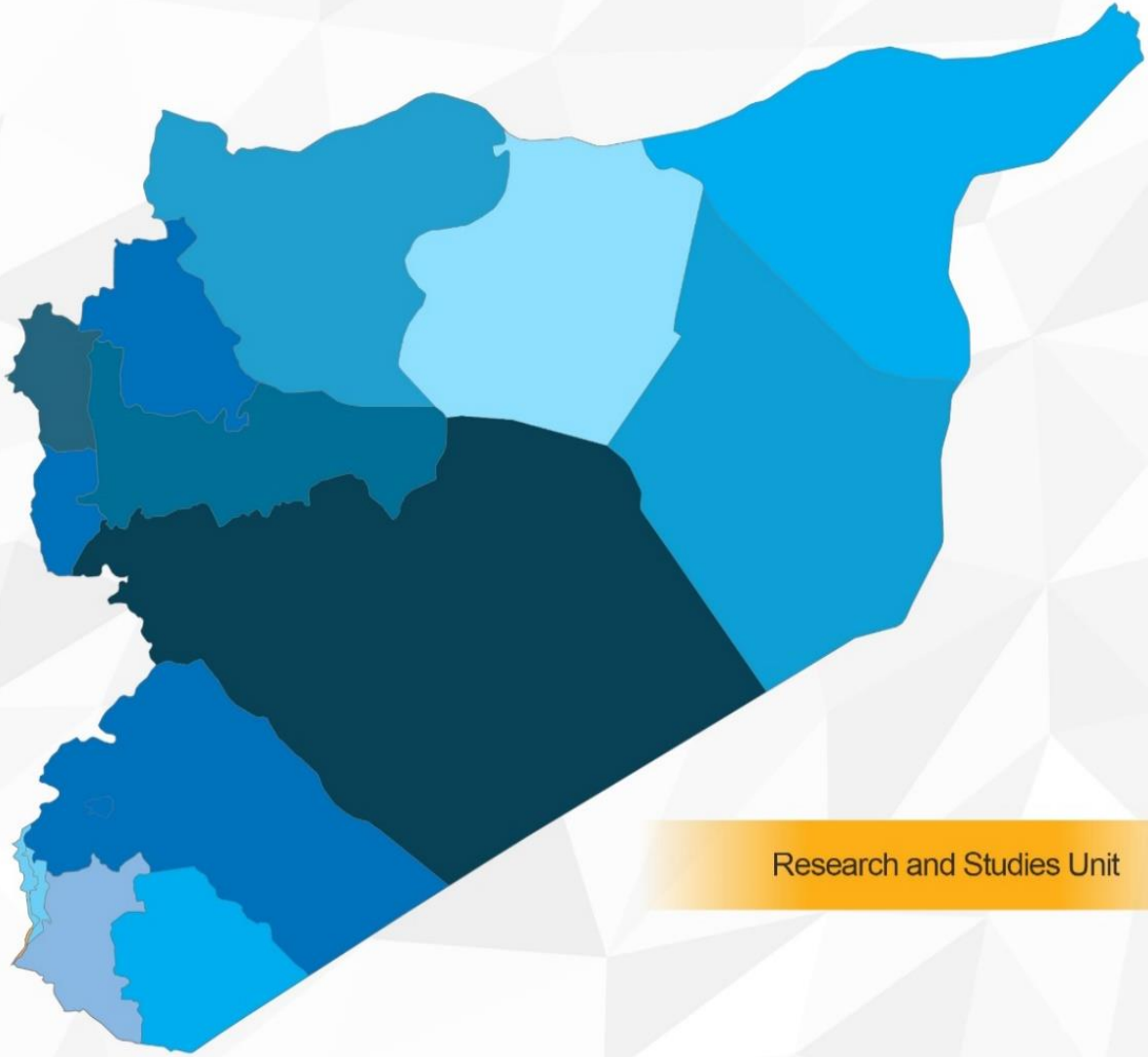


Kurdish-Arabic Dialogue Aspirations and Challenges



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Kurdish-Arabic Dialogue Aspirations and Challenges

INTRODUCTION:

The current conclusions of the Syrian scene and the decisive and critical historical phase, require the necessity for the intellectual and political categories of all their active varieties and institutions to rise, with greater awareness and national ownership. As well as, to start from an intellectual, political and social component that surpasses the visions and stereotypes dominated by negativity and rivalry. In addition to highlighting common factors between all Syrian components and working to reinforce them, with respect to working to reduce differences and try to overcome them.

Despite the existence of underlying conflicts with historical dimensions, that possess national, religious or tribal features, which in their turn might have their substantive justifications at many levels, however, in the current stage the need requires to be met more than ever, also despite many policies and procedures followed by some ruling regimes in particular periods of time, which have led to the primacy of ethnicism or sectarianism over nationalism, as a reaction to the followed practices and policies. Especially, after it has risen, increased and became more complex, in the stages following the peaceful period of the Syrian revolution, which turned into open conflicts, manifested by violence and feuds. After it was supported and politicized by international and regional parties, to dismantle the social texture and risk civil peace between the Syrian components in general, and the Arabic and Kurdish components in particular.

Historical facts have proven the futility of solutions based on disregard, ostracism, exclusion and marginalization, and neither persecution nor suppression have worked. Likewise, all means that adopted violence as an approach to deprivation of rights and silence the voices calling for freedom. As it is inevitable and there is no alternative to dialogue as a necessity, also as a useful tool for restoring bridges of confidence and finding a state of understanding and rapprochement through an exchange of opinions and views and openness to the other to come out with consensual forms to solve outstanding and pending misunderstandings and differences.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The relationship between Kurds and Arabs in Syria surpassed various circumstances and had always been, in several parts, governed by the relationship aspect between the Syrian regime and Kurds. As well as, by the type of Kurdish demands and aspirations in Syria, which used to be established for different periods of harmony or rivalry. Despite that, the social relations between Kurds and Arabs were characterized by high strength. In addition to social values and norms which played a positive role in the societal peace between the two peoples.

The years of the Syrian revolution can be considered one of the most phases in which the Kurdish-Arabic relationship witnessed a kind of tension and dispute threatening civil peace. However, the existing political and military differences between the two peoples did not impact the form of the societal relationship that much. The Kurds and Arabs maintained a kind of societal harmony and preserved part of the relationship between the two sides and on civil peace in the most severe periods in which violence escalated in the Kurdish areas that were subjected to violent military attacks by Syrian Islamic factions, supported by the Turkish army. Although alternative Syrian media institutions have played a negative role by working on hate speech between Kurds and Arabs, fueling negative feelings between both sides and trying to strike common interests, peaceful coexistence and societal peace, which prevails in large areas of NES. However, this policy, while partially influencing at times, has not been successful.

KURDISH-ARABIC RELATIONSHIP BEFORE THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION:

The relationship between Kurds and Arabs in the Al-Jazeera region was characterized by good neighborliness and harmony in most times. As a matter of fact, we might find it strange that there were tribal alliances established in previous historical periods between Kurdish and Arabic tribes, which clashed with other alliances that included Arabs and other Kurds according to the requirements of interest and influence.¹

The Kurdish-Arabic relationship was governed by either a feud or harmony, in the post-establishment stage of the first Kurdish party and before the emergence of Arabic nationalist movements and parties. A feud which could be conceived as more of a struggle for tribal influence and rivalry for agricultural and pastoral areas than a national conflict. There were Kurdish tribes allying with other Arabic ones against aspirations of other tribes, in the context of simple alliances with few complexities, however purely utilitarian and not dependent on the national dimension. Whereas, the existing harmony was accompanied by ties that strengthen the tribal and clan ties and their durability through intermarriage, affinity, and other social relationships; which later contributed, unintentionally, to the founding of the idea of civil peace

¹ The Image of Arabs in Kurdish Oral Heritage <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ar/arabs-kurds-popular-culture/>



and its application in reality, despite the ruling regime deceit in Damascus and their desire to turn Arabs over Kurds, just like the years of separation and the Ba'athist rule.²

Without delving into the practices of the Arabic regimes in Syria against the Kurdish presence in Syria. For the Arabic and Kurdish societies have lived through long periods of time in some kind of interconnected social, cultural and economic relations of which existed before the establishment of the Syrian state and through old historical periods.

There is a long common history between both peoples, regarding the relationship between them. As they have been engaged in many conflicts side by side, such as the Crusades and their joint revolts against the Ottoman rule. Both peoples were not familiar with any form of conflict except during the recent decades, due to the dominance of a political party of Syria and Iraq under national and racial slogans to quickly conclude to family dictatorships which practiced systematic persecution against the Kurds in both countries.³

The Kurdish-Arabic relations, In 2004, witnessed a hazardous and intimidating progress of civil and societal peace in Syria, after a clash between the crowds of Al-Jihad team, from Qamishlo/Qamishli and Al-Fatwa from Deir Ezzor in Qamishlo/Qamishli, lead to a Kurdish uprising in all Kurdish cities and towns and in the Kurdish neighborhoods in Damascus and Aleppo. It resulted in killing and injuring tens of people, as well as arrestment of thousands of Kurds and seeking refuge in Kurdistan Region of Iraq by Kurdish citizens.⁴

The clashes began between Al-Jihad and Al-Fatwa teams, due to raising posters of Saddam Hussein by Al-Fatwa fans, insulting the Iraqi Kurdish leaders and accusing Kurds of treason and being agents for the United States, with the support and guidance of the Syrian regime.⁵ An intensive tension was generated at that time in the Kurdish-Arabic relationship in Al-Hasakah governorate and in other Syrian governorates, whose effects gradually disappeared between the two peoples over time.

During the Kurdish uprising, the Syrian regime strived to demonstrate a national dilemma between Kurds and Arabs in Syria, by arming a number of Arab tribes and issuing orders to break into the Kurdish shops and houses supervised by Syrian regime officers, who shared those lootings in the cities of Al-Hassakah and Qamishli/Qamishli and Ras al-Ain/SereKaniye.⁶

KURDISH-ARABIC DIALOGUE IMPEDIMENTS:

It is not possible to detect a Kurdish-Arabic dialogue according to its evident terms, in the contemporary history of Syria; in particular after the Ba'ath Party assumed power in the country. As the dialogues were constrained to some of the side and secret discussions that took place between students and some political movements in Syria. Moreover, perhaps the

² Kurdish-Arabic Relationship: Questions of the Present and Future <https://bit.ly/3ituAjE>

³After the Alliance of Erdogan and Khamenei, what are the Options of Kurds and Arabs? <https://arbne.ws/39cwErs>

⁴16 Years since Al-Qamishli 2004 Events ... Testimonies and Details <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/31733>

⁵16 Years since Al-Qamishli 2004 Events ... Testimonies and Details <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/31733>

⁶Syrians supporting "Olive Branch": Reject Theft, but Support Turkish occupation <https://daraj.com/2542/>



most prominent stage was the time of movement for the Communist Work League in which dialogues took place between Kurds and Arabs, among the youth category. For large numbers of Kurdish youth became involved in the league, which later turned into the Communist Work Party. On that occasion, a group of Syrian Arab youth were introduced to the Kurdish case more broadly, however these discussions did not result in any application on the ground, as the League and its members faced unprecedented repression from the Syrian regime.

The regimes ruling Syria had established, most notably the Ba'ath Party, a state of alienation and despise even between Kurds and Arabs. These regimes had constructed solid unbreakable walls in the way to a grave and reasonable Kurdish-Arabic dialogue that conduct outcomes that accommodate the national and sectarian rampage afflicting the region.

The Kurdish-Arabic dialogue seem to be in a stage that could be more complicated than any previous stage, due to the hindering obstacles of a full societal peace establishment, the maintenance of civil peace and the resolution of the most influential differences between both peoples which resulted from regional military interventions in Syria.

The current reality in Syria reinforces the absence of the possibility to find common ground between the two parties to start any dialogue process. Likewise, in light of the existing hate speech between Kurds and Arabs and the presence of more than one Syrian military and political force, work to intensify the societal rift between the two parties. Furthermore, the impact of tensions between the Pro-Turkey political movements and the dissatisfied Muslim Brotherhood with any dialogue that conclude in the recognition of Kurds' rights as a people on their historical land. On the other hand, the presence of some Kurdish political and media movements that do not operate seriously in this regard.

Evidently, the current situation makes it difficult to find actual actors representing the Kurdish and Arabic societies, who express their aspirations, demands and interests in relationship issues between both peoples and issues of civil peace. As the occurring political and military divisions, have produced different categories of representatives of peoples and regions in Syria, these categories also, change according to the international or regional party.

SYRIAN REVOLUTION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE KURDISH-ARABIC DIALOGUE:

Many relied on the Syrian revolution, that started in the spring of 2011, to be an introduction to grave and productive dialogues between all components of the Syrian variety, especially between the two main Kurdish and Arabic peoples in the country. In particular, those that were finding fragility in the Syrian regime structure, consequently, fragility in its policies outcomes. Likewise, many pictured that the regime and its outcomes will fall under the slogans weight that filled the streets in Syrian cities and towns. However, what happened was completely contrary to the expected, as the Syrian regime expressed ferocity and brutality in confronting the streets. Therefore, its military machines have left hundreds of thousands of dead, millions of displaced and migrants and destroyed the infrastructure of the country. Consequently, this



gave the opportunity for the aspiring countries to occupy parts of the country and to increase the division and societal rift.

In the same tragic context, the theory of the influence of the Syrian regime fragility was deconstructed in front of the amount of hatred and sectarian and national weighting between the Syrian components. In a manner that the Syrian revolution turned into an armed one to turn, later on, into a civil war. This is justified by the ability of the regime of creating and complicating crises. In addition to the failure of the opposition by its political and military institutions to confront what the system sought, on the contrary, it later became an assisting tool in its hand in reaching its aspirations.

The Syrian Kurds raised their voices in the main streets and squares in Qamishli, Derik/Al-Malikiyah, Amouda, Kobani/Ain Al-Arab and Afrin, calling for freedom and overthrowing the regime, in relation with the Syrian revolution and its slogans calling for “freedom, the united Syrian people, and the overthrow of the regime.” The “prevalence of the revolution” period has prolonged more than the desired expectations and hopes to an extent that the Kurdish movement created an atmosphere of intense rivalry, chanting slogans that spilled into the streets; different from the slogans chanted at the beginning of the popular movement, as a desire of each Kurdish party to strengthen its publicity within the Kurdish street. Therefore, they raised banners calling for purely national slogans of a Kurdish gist, along all-inclusive Syrian slogans, which established a pragmatic idea, that the Kurdish nationalist parties followed in order to gain the sympathy of the street, as a result, chants were followed for federalism. The replacement of the slogans with slogans raised by the Kurdish movement paved the way for a severe rift between the Kurdish movement and the rest of the opposition varieties. Moreover, this has shaken the Arabic perception of the Kurds, in a manner that the dispute developed into something similar to the conclusive Arabic rejection of the national federalism project and a Kurdish intransigence in this demand. Thereafter, the Kurdish formation calling for federalism; namely the Kurdish National Council, was affiliated with the National Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, to further eliminate the issue of federalism, as it depicts a matter of conflict and dispute between the opposition and the Kurdish forces to a later time, in search of relative harmony. However, this harmony was likely to deteriorate and retreat when insistence on this particular requirement intensified.⁷

Concerning the realized dynamism and interaction by the Kurdish National Council, the Democratic Union Party has performed initial steps by announcing the Self-Administration in Rojava; west of Kurdistan, thereby adding the three cantons “Al-Jazeera - Kobani - Afrin” to its project in governing the Kurdish region and filling in the gap of Damascus Authority. The party showed a great capability and its fame exceeded expectations, due to the progressive military capabilities of the party and its international alliances, as a result of its open confrontations with ISIS to announce later its federal project, however it stripped it of its national feature it brought from “Rojava” to become “North Syria Federalism.” Despite the attempt of the Democratic Union to diminish the concerns of Syrian Arabs and Turkey, who is lurking the

⁷ Kurdish-Arabic Relationship: Questions of the Present and Future <https://bit.ly/2ZETXqC>



Democratic Union project, on matters related to the latter's intellectual, if not membership, alliance with the Kurdistan Workers' System, by removing the Kurdish indication and replacing it with another general and regional one. Also, integrating large numbers of Arab and Syrian fighters into its military establishment, did not alleviate the "Arabic" Syrian concern about the distribution projects neither Turkey's official concerns.⁸

Doubtless to say that the Arabic political movement in Syria bears somewhat the bargaining burden that the Syrians have reached, as the discourse of the opposition did not hold any connotations that reassure the other side. Hereby, a reference is made to the majority of which its duty is to deliver these messages, of course, using the terms of "majority and "minority" is only for description. On the contrary, as the Arabic political categories' discourse dealt with the generalities in the context of the majority, it made the minority feel like their cause will be diluted within these propositions. Not to mention that some categories, that adopted the modern state concept and operated within civic community organizations during Damascus spring, had turned, after the "revolution," against their proud concepts. Likewise, their speech became chauvinistic manifested in hatred and banishment of the other. Even some of them went further and adopted an arrogant language with ridiculous intolerance that reached the extent of calling Kurds insults and a look of contempt while others denied their existence ultimately.⁹

MEDIA AND HATE SPEECH AND ITS IMPACT ON THE KURDISH-ARABIC DIALOGUE:

Two major events marked the outbreak of hate speech by a segment. The first was the invasion of ISIS of Kobani city accompanied by the emergence of gloating feelings to the destruction of the city from people affiliated with the Syrian opposition. The second was YPG's expulsion of ISIS from Tell Abyad which was followed by the launch of a systematic campaign led by activists from the opposition and was based on spreading a discourse promoting that the Arabs are being subjected to a genocide and ethnic cleansing by the YPG. The support of international human rights organizations for the allegations of forced displacement gave this discourse a justification for inciting a counter war, which sometimes paralleled with the discourse of ISIS.¹⁰

On the Kurdish side, the segment that used to perceive Arabs as people whom they could not coexist with in one country, had increased and it was obvious that there was a wide chasm separating the two sides, in terms of a lack of cognitive acquisition on the part of the opponents against the Kurdish case and its history. Moreover, a lack of awareness that the Syrian entity itself is a modern one whose political life does not exceed a few decades.¹¹

The hate speech gradually worsened, as the Kurds, represented in the Self-Administration, have come to be called separatists and the YPG as separatist militias. In addition to the

⁸ Kurdish-Arabic Relationship: Questions of the Present and Future <https://bit.ly/39cNeYf>

⁹ In Response to Legitimate Questions on the Present and Future Relationship of the Kurds and Arabs

http://www.rok-online.com/?p=4742&fbclid=IwAR0bbuZOs_Dp7JHQ-cm82u4ssAGrWUbfO_zbawKXIMiGACrel1FvmtLzGyo

¹⁰ Hate Speech between Arabs and Kurds; a Promotion for "ISIS" <http://www.rok-online.com/?p=5656>

¹¹ Hate Speech between Arabs and Kurds; a Promotion for "ISIS" <http://www.rok-online.com/?p=5656>



promotion of other more intense discourses considering the Kurds as migratory groups that settled not long ago in Syria. In a manner that a discourse has been promoted for questioning the authenticity of Kurds in their regions and this promotion was more advanced than other incitement discourses. As it was promoted by academicians and writers through articles and researches that provide evidence to the hypothesis which states that Kurds are a settler people on Arabic land. The intention of this speech is to indicate that Kurds have no right to claim national rights and that Arabs have the right to confront this project in every means including the mean of war. Consequently, this discourse was reflected on opposition media, as well as individual initiatives in the form of programs on YouTube that adopted the method of inciting irony.¹²

In 2014, the Syrian regime forces, supported by Iraqi and Lebanese sectarian factions, forcibly displaced residents of several Syrian cities and towns, such as ancient residential neighborhoods in Homs governorate and its countryside. Likewise, residents of cities and towns in the Damascus countryside governorate such as Madaya and Daraya. Therefore, the alternative Syrian media seemed to depend on these issues as one of the most significant issues in confronting the Syrian regime media organs. At the same time, and during that particular period, Syrian Islamic Opposition Factions carried out forced displacement operations of Kurds in Kurdish cities and towns in the countryside of Aleppo governorate, such as the towns of Tell-Hasel and Tell-A'aran, however the Syrian opposition media itself did not adopt this case and did not shed light on it.¹³

This method continued in the city of Tell Abyad; for when Islamic factions affiliated with Jabhat al-Nusra seized control of the city and displaced thousands of Kurds, those institutions called Tell Abyad as "liberated." Moreover, after ISIS seized the cities, forced the remaining Kurds to displace and looted their houses and properties, they also, did not issue any designation to any Syrian media institution documenting that.¹⁴

During the past years of the Syrian revolution, tens of print, audio and visual media organizations have been active in Syria and these institutions have presented themselves as an alternative for the official Syrian media that operate under the authority of the Syrian regime. Alongside these institutions, many pages on social media platforms were active in the same context. These institutions played a pivotal role in promoting hate speech among the components of Syrian society, in particular between Kurds and Arabs, and more precisely, the institutions or pages that adopt the view of a variety of Syrian opposition or are broadcasted from Turkey.

The Syrian opposition media institutions, by their various affiliations, adopted in its transmission of the Kurdish issue, a hostile approach against the Kurds, using stereotypes and ready-made charges that stigmatize any Kurdish attempt to appear within the political and military scenes. Of course, always being declared under the pretext of referring to SDF or YPG

¹²Hate Speech between Arabs and Kurds; a Promotion for "ISIS" <http://www.rok-online.com/?p=5656>

¹³Alternative Syrian Media: For all Displaced Except Kurds <http://www.rok-online.com/?p=14814>

¹⁴Alternative Syrian Media: For all Displaced Except Kurds <http://www.rok-online.com/?p=14814>



and not the Kurds themselves. This is as well, what these institutions did not succeed in, as the Kurds mostly, even if among them are those who oppose the Self-Administration and the SDF, however, they do not view them as an enemy or as groups separate from the Kurdish society.¹⁵

On January 20 in 2018, Turkish forces, backed by Syrian Islamic factions, announced¹⁶ a ground and air military operation aimed at occupying the Kurdish city; Afrin in the Aleppo governorate, northwest of Syria. Turkey and Syrian Islamic factions carried out demographic change operations, expelled Kurdish civilians and replaced them with Arabic residents from different Syrian governorates. Likewise, they carried out killings, displacement, armed robberies, and looting of civilian houses and properties.

The occupation of the city of Afrin operation, escalated hate speech between Kurds and Arabs. As the Turkish and Syrian media institutions played a prominent role in this speech and social media pages began to accuse the Kurds of separatism or atheism.

The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on ninth of October in 2019, announced¹⁷ the launch of a military operation called the "Spring of Peace" in the cities of Ras Al-Ain/Serekaniye and Tell Abyad/Giresipi. This operation generated a new wave of hate speech between Kurds and Arabs through accusations and insults on social media pages. In addition to accusations and incitement carried out by Syrian media institutions loyal to Turkey which affected the relationship between the Kurdish and Arabic peoples in Syria, despite the fact that the military operation caused the displacement of tens of thousands of Kurds and Arabs from both cities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The need for a real and democratic change, comprehensive development and the establishment of a new Syria, in which security and stability prevail and in which all Syrians enjoy their legitimate rights, can only be met through dialogue as a methodology based on international covenants and treaties. Covenants guaranteeing all fundamental rights and freedoms and give peoples the right to decide their fate. As well as, establishing an ideal environment for peaceful coexistence and societal cohesion.

The reality impose on Kurds and Arabs, striking each other, denying each other's right to exist on their historical land and trying to loot rights of others, instead of searching for the internal development of each people through serious dialogue to form a relationship that provides both peoples with the means of stability, safety, and prosperity of the geography on which they live. Whether this was in a centralized state, which has become difficult to reach, or through another form of the state through which a state can be reached; one that preserves the rights of everyone. This form is imposed on any political system that rises to power in the country, in a manner that it becomes a supra-constitutional norm that cannot be overlooked or allows for, regardless any political movements and ruling regimes, playing on the card of the Kurdish-

¹⁵Syrian Opposition Media... From Reporting the Event to Fueling Civil War <https://bit.ly/2WBWGzf>

¹⁶Turkish Army Launches Operation "Olive Branch" in Syrian Afrin <https://bit.ly/3eHPhVe>

¹⁷Erdogan Declares the Turkish Military Operation of "Spring of Peace " in North Syria <https://bit.ly/32wNnEq>



Arabic conflict. Moreover, even allowing regional countries with expansionist ambitions, such as Turkey and Iran, to take advantage of any rift between both peoples.

Inevitably, no matter how complicated the scene was, however, there must be a light at the end of the tunnel and there must be means to resolve the complications in the general Syrian scene, and the Kurdish-Arabic relationship in particular. As dialogue and access to agreed belongings are fundamental in building a comfortable and reassuring relationship for both parties, as a fateful condition to Kurds and Arabs alike. Especially, since both peoples, along with the rest of the other ethnicities and sects, have reached the exhaustion level. Hence, the current crisis cannot be overcome without agreeing on common belongings based on common and mutual interests. Based on this, the Kurdish and Arabic societies, the Syrian media institutions and political movements are under the obligation of working to find a comprehensive dialogue between Kurds and Arabs, as well as, urgent international support through:

IN THE SOCIETAL FIELD:

- 1- Support civil and societal peace initiatives.
- 2- Support the formation of civil peace committees.
- 3- Support training workshops and dialogue sessions between Kurds and Arabs.
- 4- Support studies and researches in the societal field between Kurds and Arabs.

IN THE POLITICAL FIELD:

- 1- Work to provide a ground for a comprehensive Kurdish-Arabic dialogue.
- 2- Work on open dialogues between the different Kurdish and Arabic political parties.

IN THE MEDIA FIELD:

- 1- Work on a media code of ethics to reduce hate speech.
- 2- Work on open media dialogues between media organizations to reduce hate speech.
- 3- Support youth initiatives on social media pages, aiming at Kurdish-Arabic rapprochement.



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