

THE KURDISH-KURDISH DIALOGUE IN SYRIA

Studies and Researches Unit



ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies

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Table of Contents:

Introduction:	4
The Executive Summary:.....	4
The Kurdish Political Movement in Syria:	5
The Kurdish-Kurdish Dialogue:	7
Hawler I Agreement:.....	8
Hawler II Agreement:.....	9
Dohuk Agreement and the Formation of the Kurdish Political Authority:.....	9
Reasons for Agreements' Failure:	10
Initiative of the SDF General Commander Mazloun Abdi:.....	11
The Role of Media in the Kurdish-Kurdish Dialogue:.....	12
The Role of Civil Society in the Kurdish-Kurdish Dialogue:	13
Recommendations and Conclusions:	14
References:	14

Introduction:

The Kurdish political movement has suffered since the establishment of its first party (the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party), in June 1957, from various and multiple political, social and regional circumstances and disputes. Its members and supporters were subjected to compelling circumstances; like security prosecutions, arbitrary arrests, and martial court rulings. This forced many of them to leave the country, consequently leading to lack of various forms of stability of the Kurdish movement.

Within the aforementioned context, the tyranny of personal interests over the public interest and political dissonance, as well as regional, tribal and domestic differences, led to a series of splits within the Kurdish political movement and the situation gradually developed into the formation of dozens of Kurdish parties.

During the past few years, the Kurdish political movement in Syria has witnessed new intellectual, organizational and alliance differences, as well as a more expansion and impactful interference in Syrian Kurdish internal affairs by the Kurdish parties in Iraq and Turkey.

Since the start of the popular protests in Syria against the Syrian regime in March 2011, inclusive Kurdish political frameworks have been formed:

New parties, youth organizations, civil organizations, and etc. However, these frameworks failed to formulate a unified Kurdish vision and to establish a comprehensive political discourse on Kurdish national issues in Syria.

During the past years, Kurdish and international parties have actively pursued political initiatives, to bridge the gap between the main Kurdish political poles in Syria. However, all these efforts have not found a method to implement and succeed, as each Kurdish political party blames the other for the failure of these initiatives.

The Executive Summary:

Kurdish, regional and international parties have tried, repeatedly and on different time periods and political and military circumstances, to work to unify the ranks of the Kurdish political movement in Syria. However, all previous attempts failed and were not given an opportunity even to implement these agreements' provisions. All the terms the Kurdish political parties in Syria agreed upon, in agreements of Hawler (1-2) and Dohuk and in the negotiations and the mini-side agreements, were not implemented and they failed even before they began.

The failure of these agreements was due to many different reasons, including partisanship and the attempt to exclusiveness in making decisions, including the hate speech that contributed to creating a greater divergence between the two Kurdish movement poles; the

Kurdish National Council and the National Unity parties. In addition to the Democratic Union Party and the interference of the Kurdistani parties in the internal affairs of Kurds in Syria.

Along the announcement of Mazloum Abdi, the General Commander of the SDF, of his initiative seeking to unify the Kurdish ranks and American support for that initiative, there is a great possibility that this initiative will succeed, through which the results of consensus will be implemented and a unified Kurdish Syrian political reference will be formed.

The Kurdish Political Movement in Syria:

Kurdish cultural and social associations and forums in Syria represented the basis for the Kurdish political movement formation and the basis for the formation of the national, cultural and cognitive awareness of the Kurdish people. As it played a pivotal role in the Kurds' tendency in Syria to learn and pay attention to the Kurdish language. Likewise, to identify the Kurdish political and social transformations under the Ottoman Empire before its disintegration. It made a great effort in introducing the Kurds to their heritage and their spoken literature, which later turned into a written literature and culture among different classes in the Kurdish society, right up to the establishment of the first Kurdish political party in Syria. Most of their members ran those associations and cultural forums during the period of the French Mandate in Syria, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.¹

In the midst of the Syrian national political movement and at a stage in which Syria enjoyed a democratic milieu during the years between 1954 and 1958, objective necessities imposed the existence of a Kurdish political party, whose political program summarizes the Kurdish people's aspirations in Syria and the guarantee of their legitimate natural and human rights according to the given data at that time. As liberation movements throughout the world were in a state of resurgence for salvation and liberation. There was a set of stimuli that contributed to the emergence of the first Kurdish political organization in Syria and created an accumulated state of struggle among the Kurdish people and their elites. As a matter of fact, Kurdish cultural associations and forums were a cover for political action as a tool to evade the harassment of Kurdish feudal lords and the persecution of the French. In the national state stage, the nationalist parties; Al-Baath, the Syrian Social Nationalist and the Syrian Communist Party, played the same role in harassing any Syrian Kurdish activity and accusing the activists of separatism. However, all the pressures failed to prevent the formation of the first Kurdish political party, which is the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria on 14/6/1957, as it was founded by a group of Kurdish youth, including; Osman Sabri, Abd al-Hamid Darwish, Hamza Nuwayran, Rashid Hamo, Shawkat Hanan, Sheikh Muhammad Issa, Khaled Mashayekh, Jagarkhween, Nur al-Din Zaza, Muhammad Ali Khoja, Khalil Mohammad. The late Iraqi president and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani, Abdul Rahman Al-Dabihi and Abdullah Ishaqi, who were refugees in Syria, had a role in providing

¹ The Emergence and Development of the Kurdish Political Movement in Syria: Preliminary Preface
<https://www.asocenter.org/ar/node/552>

advice for the launch of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, in addition to the distinguished efforts of Princess Roshan Badrkhan, as the political program of the party included 10 paragraphs, among the most prominent of its contents and summarizing the essence of the Kurdish issue in Syria were:²

- 1- The party fights for the maintenance of national independence in Syria.
- 2- Work to achieve a popular democratic system in Syria.
- 3- Create a specific status for the Kurds in Syria, to achieve their political, social and cultural rights.
- 4- The party relies in its national social struggle on all patriotic Kurds and honorable democrats.

The Kurdish political movement went through unstable organizational conditions, as it was affected by splits. Also, as soon as the first Kurdish political parties were established in Syria, the movement witnessed splits in its ranks and the only Kurdish political party in Syria has branched into many.

The Kurdish movement in Syria was unique, compared to other neighboring countries, by the abundance of its parties that resulted from splits that began in August 1960 with the imprisonment of the Kurdish Democratic Party leadership in Syria (founded in 1957). Thus, between the beginning of the 80s of the last century and the end of the second millennium, a split serial was launched; in a manner that each party produces two then that two begets four, and so on ... until today, it has reached more than 40 parties.

One of the most prominent splits that led to the formation of the "Left Democratic Party" and the "Progressive Democratic Party" in 1965 and after a failed attempt to unify the "Progressive" and "Left", a third party was formed, the "Kurdish Democratic Party" in Syria (the interim leadership). This was followed by other splits which were concentrated in the "Left" and "Democratic" bodies, and at a lesser level in the "Progressive", to form in turn, some of the grand parties, such as the "Unity" party; formed from dissidents from the democrat. As well as, the "Yekiti" and "Azadi" parties (those formed of defectors from the left), in addition to a large number of smaller and less influential parties.³

Personal conflicts, the inability of Kurdish parties to organize partisan institutional work and the absence of a culture of political parties among the Kurds in Syria have played a significant role in the splits of the Kurdish political Movement in Syria. Moreover, the alignment with the Kurdish parties, particularly the alignments with the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, have played a fundamental role in the case of political strife and disagreement between Kurdish frameworks and groupings.

² The Emergence and Development of the Kurdish Political Movement in Syria: Preliminary Preface <https://www.asocenter.org/ar/node/552>

³ Splits Among Kurdish Parties: Cracks Appear in Political Landscape <https://enabbaladi.net/archives/155098>

The Kurdish-Kurdish Dialogue:

After 2011 and the outbreak of popular protests in Syria against the Syrian regime, the Kurdish-Kurdish differences re-appeared again and the division scene began to become more apparent. On October 26, 2011, a group of traditional Kurdish political parties and independent Kurdish political and social figures, in addition to the youth coordinators, held the Kurdish National Conference in Syria, in order to reach the constitution of a unified Kurdish vision for a solution in Syria and to codify the Kurdish people's national demands. Back then, the conference decided to dissolve all the Kurdish frameworks under which the parties participating in the conference belonged (the Front - the Alliance - the Coordination - the Political Council ...) and the conference was considered a Kurdish national council.

The Democratic Society Movement was established in the 3rd month of the same year, in Derik/Al-Malikiyah city in Al-Hasaka governorate. At that time, it consisted of 4 main entities, which were the People's Assembly of Western Kurdistan, the Democratic Union Party, the Star Union, and the Martyrs' Families Organization. However, the Democratic Society Movement has recently made changes to its organizational structure; it changed the structure of the movement and started to focus on civil work aspects only. As well as, the removal of Kurdish political parties from the movement, to join the Democratic Self-Administration and the Syrian Democratic Council, as independent political organizations. Since their presence in the Self-Administration and the Syrian Democratic Council was a single bloc, representing the democratic community movement, while the movement has come to include civil actors and entities, such as; civil unions "the teachers union, the farmers' union, the workers union ... etc." In addition to unions located in the areas controlled by the Self-Administration, such as; "the union of pharmacists, industrialists, artists, intellectuals, and Cash dealers.... etc."

After the formation of the Self-Administration by a group of Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac-Assyrian political parties, the gap of differences between the Kurdish parties, has become greater, especially between the two main poles in the Kurdish political movement, represented by the Kurdish National Council, which includes a group of Kurdish parties, and the Democratic Society Movement, which includes the Democratic Union Party along with a group of Kurdish political parties.

Multiple international and Kurdish parties intervened to bridge the gap between the Kurdish parties and worked to reach an agreement that resolves the outstanding issues between both parties and to form a unified Kurdish political front. However, all these attempts failed, due to the lack of commitment of the Syrian Kurdish parties to the signed agreements' decisions.

Civil organizations and social, intellectual and literary Kurdish and Syrian associations, remain seeking to hold dialogue sessions and political discussions between the main Kurdish political parties in the country, in order to reach a Kurdish-Syrian political solution that leads to the formation of a common ground that writes down the Kurdish political, cultural and social

demands. Not to mention, seeking a solution to the Kurdish issue and creating actual political representation that depicts the Kurdish political and popular space and meets its aspirations and desires.

Concerning this, more than one civil, literary and social group worked to communicate with the Kurdish National Council, the Democratic Society Movement and the Democratic Self-Administration to bring both sides closer together and find methods for a comprehensive political dialogue that brings them together.

Likewise, François Sénémaud, the French ambassador in charge of the Syrian file, had held meetings with representatives of Kurdish political groups in Syria, the capital Paris, during the past months, through a French initiative. This initiative aimed to resolve the existing differences between the Kurdish National Council and the Democratic Society Movement.

At the time, the initiative, according to media and informed sources, stipulated that the Kurdish political parties in Syria adhere to Security Council resolutions and relevant international decisions in resolving the crisis in Syria. As well as strengthening confidence measures between the Kurdish parties in Syria and the participation of all Kurdish parties in the political process.

Hawler I Agreement:

The Hawler I Agreement was the first Kurdish political agreement in Syria and it was between both of the main political poles, namely; the Kurdish National Council and the People's Assembly for Western Kurdistan (the current democratic society movement). The agreement was carried out under the direct auspices of the former President of KRI and the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Massoud Barzani, on 6/11/2012 and it was called Hawler I Agreement, as it was held in Hawler/Erbil city; KRI's capital.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the Kurdish National Council and the People's Assembly for Western Kurdistan and the Kurdish politician, Hamid Darbandi, head of the Public Relations Office in the Presidency of KRI.

Both sides signed a joint agreement, stating; "With the aim of laying down the necessary mechanisms to activate the agreement and crystallize a unified political project based on the patriotic and national constants of the Kurdish people in Syria and to work with all components of the Syrian people. This is in order to overthrow the oppressive regime that brought the country to the destructive civil war and to build a democratic Syria according to a new constitution that recognizes national pluralism and the national rights of the Kurdish people constitutionally, in accordance with international covenants and agreements. Also, resolving the Kurdish issue within the framework of political decentralization, abolishing all exceptional racist laws and decrees, removing their effects and compensating those affected."

Among the most significant provisions that came in the agreement of the Kurdish National Council in Syria and the People's Assembly of Western Kurdistan, were the following:

- Forming a joint supreme body (the Kurdish Supreme Commission), whose mission is to formulate public policy and lead the Kurdish movement in this crucial stage. As well as, to adopt the principle of "parity" in the structure of all committees and consensus in decision-making.
- Forming 3 specialized committees to follow up the field work.
- Adopting Hawler document, relying upon it, activating the items contained therein and laying down the necessary mechanisms for its implementation.

Hawler II Agreement:

Several months after the Hawler I Agreement was signed and the Kurdish National Council and the People's Assembly for Western Kurdistan, returned to Syria to follow up on the terms that had been agreed upon between both parties in Hawler, differences began to appear again between both parties. As they started accusing each other of attempting to hinder the agreement implementation. Therefore, the items of this agreement remained not implemented in Hawler I Agreement, with both sides not being able to apply any of these terms, which were sponsored by the former president of the KRI and the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party; Masoud Barzani.

In order to have the supreme Kurdish body, which was one of the results of the Hawler I Agreement and re-establish new provisions that paves the way for an actual Kurdish agreement in Syria

Masoud Barzani called the Kurdish National Council and the People's Assembly for Western Kurdistan for the second time to Hawler, the KRI capital, on December 23, 2013, to reach a new agreement between both parties, in order to save the supreme Kurdish body, which was formed as a result of the Hawler I Agreement, and re-establish new provisions that prepare for an actual Kurdish consensus in Syria, since the terms of the first agreement failed and were not successful.

The provisions of Hawler II Agreement also, focused on the necessity for Syria to be a federal, democratic, parliamentary and multinational state. As well as, concentrate on rebuilding Syria according to the federal system and on considering Kurds as a nation with an integrated geopolitical unit.

Indeed, both sides signed the terms of the Hawler II Agreement, which was somewhat similar to the Hawler I Agreement. However, signing it was of importance, as it coincided with the international preparations for the convening of the Geneva 2 conference. Thus, both sides worked on formulating a unified and inclusive Kurdish union to participate in the international conference for a solution in Syria.

Dohuk Agreement and the Formation of the Kurdish Political Authority:

At a time when the Kurdish National Council and the Democratic Society Movement agreed on a new Kurdish political vision in Syria and on the night before Geneva conference 2, the Democratic Community Movement announced, along with a group of Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac

and Assyrian political parties, the formation of the Democratic Self-Administration and in the absence of the Kurdish National Council. This was rejected by the Kurdish National Council and considered it an attempt by the Democratic Community to monopolize authority of the Kurdish region in Syria and also as a violation of Hawler II Agreement.

Consequently, the political disagreement between both sides increased, the intensity of the statements enhanced and reached the point of direct accusations of betrayal and subordination to regional countries. Thus, systematic media campaigns began, on both sides; on Kurdish sites, agencies and broadcasts and the conflict gradually turned into a state of complete estrangement between both parties.

In order to bridge the rift and try to find a new consensus between both parties, the KRI presidency after an agreement with the Kurdistan Community Movement, restored to holding a meeting between the Democratic Society Movement and the Kurdish National Council in Dohuk city in KRI.

The meeting took place on 10/14/2014, during which both sides reached a new agreement, under the auspices of the former president of the KRI, Masoud Barzani, where the provisions this time stipulated the formation of a Kurdish political reference in Syria. As well as, the negotiation between both sides regarding the Self-Administration announced by the Community Movement Democracy and amending its programs and form to the satisfaction of both parties. Moreover, forming a joint committee between the two parties; for the defense issue and a joint military force formation.

Reasons for Agreements' Failure:

With the announcement of the Kurdish political authority, the Kurdish National Council and the Democratic Society Movement reached an agreement, according to which 40% of the political authority seats will be granted to each of them. Also, 20% of the share of the forces and individuals outside the framework of both parties, provided that the percentage is 20% through the elections from the reference members. As a result, disputes began to appear again between both parties, after 9 independents and parties outside the two parties won the elections and most of them were close to the Democratic Society Movement, according to the accusation of the Kurdish National Council at the time. The elections were the cause of a major disagreement between the parties of the Kurdish National Council, which announced the dismissal of 3 major parties from the council, after accusing them of giving their votes to independent figures close to the Democratic Society Movement. However, this problem was solved, after both sides reached once again to increase the number of the reference members.

The Kurdish National Council and the Democratic Society Movement initiated the meetings of the Kurdish political authority in Qamishlo city. Both sides began to form committees affiliated with this reference, however, they quickly stopped and failed, after the Democratic Self-Administration announced that municipal elections would be held in the districts of

"Kobani – Al-Jazeera – Afrin." This was rejected by the Kurdish National Council and declared that it would not adhere to its results and did not recognize it. Thereafter, the Kurdish National Council officially announced the suspension of the Dohuk Agreement, thus, all means of agreement between both main groups in Syria ended. The former president of the KRI, Masoud Barzani, stated that Dohuk Agreement was the last possible attempt for a Kurdish-Kurdish agreement in Syria.

Initiative of the SDF General Commander Mazloum Abdi:

During the Turkish attack on the Kurdish cities in Syria, the SDF General Commander announced an initiative to unify the Kurdish ranks and position, he also, announced his meeting with the President of the KRI, Nechirvan Barzani and the KRI political leaderships. In his initiative, Abdi called on the Kurdish political parties, the most important of them being the Kurdish National Council, for dialogue and understanding to unify the Kurdish ranks. He indicated that the results of the dialogue and discussions that have taken place so far are positive. However, the results have not yet appeared, as the initiative is still ongoing and is being worked on until now.

On February 2, the Presidency of the Kurdish Council announced the reopening of its offices and headquarters in NES, 5 years after they were closed by the Internal Security Forces (Asayish). This is based on a decision stipulating the closure of the unlicensed parties' headquarters with the Self-Administration. This came within the initiative framework of the General Commander of the SDF, Mazloum Abdi, on unifying the Kurdish political position, which he launched in late October.

The negotiations between the two Kurdish parties (the Kurdish National Council and the Kurdish National Unity parties) began in Al-Hasaka city in NES, in the presence of envoys from the US State Department and the General Commander of the SDF, Mazloum Abdi.

On May 29, Mazloum Abdi announced the success of the first phase of the Kurdish-Kurdish dialogues and the start of the second phase, through a "tweet" on Twitter, published in the Kurdish language and Abdi's aspired in both parties participating in the negotiations; the Kurdish National Council and the Kurdish National Unity parties, the basis for the future and he regarded them as people's hopes.

Both sides issued a statement to public opinion, announcing the end of the first phase of negotiations. The statement reads; "On June 16, 2020, the delegations of the Kurdish National Council and the Kurdish National Unity parties in Al-Hasaka, Syria concluded the initial phase of negotiations for the unity of the Kurdish ranks and they reached a binding, joint political vision, reaching preliminary understandings and considering the 2014 Dohuk Agreement in General on governance and partnership in administration, protection and defense, as a basis for continuing the ongoing dialogue and negotiations between the two delegations, with the aim of reaching the signing of a comprehensive agreement in the near future. The two delegations affirmed the importance of Kurdish cooperation and unity in

Syria and welcomed the achievement as a fundamental historical step towards greater understanding and practical cooperation, to the benefit of the Kurdish people in Syria, as well as, Syrians of all components. Both delegations devoted their work in fulfillment of the great sacrifices of the sons and daughters of Syria, especially the martyrs and wounded of Kurdistan Rojava and their families, who sacrificed their lives in the noble and honorable fight to protect the world from the tyranny of ISIS."⁴

These understandings form a significant first step, which was reached with the auspices and assistance of the US Deputy Special Envoy for the International Coalition, Ambassador William Robak, and the General Commander of the SDF, Mazloun Abdi. Both delegations expressed their thanks and appreciation to General Mazloun Abdi for his initiative towards the Kurdish unity in Syria, as well as for the presidency of the KRI, for their support and efforts for this unity. They also, expressed their gratitude to USA for its auspices and strong support for the Kurdish unity, to achieve a more democratic and pluralistic Syrian future, where the rights of all its components are respected, according to the statement.

Negotiations are still ongoing between the two Kurdish parties, to end the second phase of negotiations and reach joint agreements, on the basis of the 2014 Dohuk Agreement.

The Role of Media in the Kurdish-Kurdish Dialogue:

Partisan Kurdish media institutions or those supported by Kurdish parties, in addition to social media, were one of the most problematic obstacles to the unity of the Kurdish ranks and the establishment of an inclusive Kurdish political situation. As these media institutions have worked since the beginning of these disputes between the Kurdish parties to exclude the other party, incite against it and promote false information about it, based on narrow visions and partisan frameworks, thus promoting together the hate speech and extremism in the Kurdish society.

Simultaneously, the various Kurdish parties mobilized their supporters on social media platforms to attack and exclude the "different other," incite against them, accuse them of treason and labor, and subordination to regional or international parties, hostile to Kurdish nationalism and their rights.

Recently, some news were published on social media, according to which the Kurdish National Council had stipulated that the Kurdish National Unity parties should not include the Kurdish Progressive Democratic Party in Syria and the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria in the Kurdish reference supposed to be formed after the end of the ongoing negotiations in the initiative presented by the General Commander of the SDF, Mazloun Abdi.

⁴ A Joint Statement by the Kurdish Council and the National Unity Parties: Dohuk Agreement as a Basis for Negotiations <https://bit.ly/34hSdov>

Thereafter, the supporters of the various Kurdish parties began an exclusionary and inciting speech against the various parties. Posts were published containing hate speech and incitement against the parties in the Kurdish National Council or both parties not yet participating in the negotiations. The Kurdish media was unable to work on clarifying the issue and stopping the discourse, but rather, media institutions were promoting that news and participating in widening the gap between the Kurdish parties without relying on any clear reference.

Even the General Commander of the SDF, Mazloum Kobani, confirmed that parties such as the Progressive Party and Unity were not excluded from the unity talks between the Kurdish parties in Kurdistan Syria, indicating that "our goal is to involve all parties in the new process."

Mazloum stated in a tweet on Twitter that "our initiative on Kurdish unity continues in line with its national values," adding that "our goal is to gradually involve all parties in the new process and parties such as Progressive and Unity have not been excluded and any news about that is not relevant."⁵

The Role of Civil Society in the Kurdish-Kurdish Dialogue:

"Civil society" is the third sector of society, along with the government and the business sector. The civil society sector consists of civil society organizations and NGOs; therefore, the UN recognizes the importance of partnering with civil society, as it strengthens the organization's ideals and supports its work.

Since 2011, dozens of civil organizations have been established in NES and have worked on issues of democracy, governance, transitional justice and societal cohesion. Not to mention, projects related to promoting dialogue and civil peace and rejecting hate speech, yet their role has remained marginal to the political transformations taking place in NES.

Civil organizations have not worked properly in the files of law, rights, duties and freedoms since the Self-Administration establishment. As they have not contributed to the amendment, introduction and study of laws and have not played the mediator role between society and the ruling parties in the region and it still has not changed.

On the level of the Kurdish-Kurdish dialogue, civil organizations have repeatedly called for the need to avoid hate speech and work to find common points between the two main Kurdish parties. However, they have not yet been able to exercise the roles assigned to them to contribute to the success of Kurdish-Kurdish consensus and have not contributed to the possibility of enacting new laws in the region after reaching a comprehensive Kurdish agreement in NES.

⁵ Mazloum Kobani Denies Excluding the Unity and Progressive Parties from the Kurdish Negotiations <https://www.rudaw.net/arabic/kurdistan/200920209>

Recommendations and Conclusions:

Kurdish political groups have preserved their existing differences between them before 2011, which began since their establishment in 1957. Contrary to the aspirations that these Kurdish parties and currents will head towards unifying the Kurdish political discourse after the outbreak of the popular protests in 2011, the differences and disputes that existed between them increased. As they are intrinsically and fundamentally related to the Syrian Kurdish partisan links with the Kurdistan, Iraqi and Turkish axes. Based on this, the Kurdish parties and the countries concerned with the ongoing negotiations between the Kurdish National Council and the Kurdish National Unity parties are supposed to abide by and carry out the following:

First: Activating the role of civil society organizations in the Kurdish negotiations and after the formation of the Kurdish political authority, to involve them in the process of enacting laws, constitutions and decisions related to governance in the areas controlled by the Self-Administration.

Second: To reject the hate speech, to stop the media campaigns carried out by the Kurdish parties that incite against the other politically different and to support the culture of dialogue and difference and acceptance of the other.

Third: Involve all political parties, including movements, parties, and associations in the Kurdish-Kurdish negotiations, in order to reach the optimal state of Kurdish consensus.

References:

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