

October 2021

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# Northeastern Syria: Repeated Attacks on Media Offices and Political Party Headquarters

The self-proclaimed Revolutionary Youth (RY) were accused of carrying out the attacks while the Autonomous Administration failed to hold the perpetrators accountable

## **Northeastern Syria: Repeated Attacks on Media Offices and Political Party Headquarters**

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On 24 September 2021, the Turkey-based Kurdish National Council (KNC)—which operates under the mantle of the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC)—held protests in several areas across northeastern Syria, decrying the price increases imposed on fuel and bread and “the royalties forced on citizens” and demanding the release of political prisoners. At dawn the next day, on 25 September, several KNC offices and headquarters in the area were attacked.

On the same day, provocations were reported against media workers in northeastern Syria, while several journalists said they received threats from Autonomous Administration loyalist individuals and online pages. The journalists and media workers were harassed because they covered the KNC-organized protests the previous day. Among the affected journalists were [Ivan Hassib](#), a correspondent with the Russian Ruptly agency, Vivian Fatah, a correspondent with Rudaw TV, and Fahd Sabri, Director of Rudaw TV’s office in northeastern Syria.

## Recommendations to the Autonomous Administration

As the authority responsible for the area where these attacks took place, the Autonomous Administrations should:

1. Establish an appropriate and safe environment to ensure that individuals and groups have access to their legitimate and legally stipulated rights and freedoms without discrimination, to guarantee their right to freedom of belief, demonstration and expression by all available means within the framework of the law, and to protect pluralism and intellectual diversity within society;
2. Ensure that all individuals and groups have access to their right to live in security and personal safety without discrimination, in addition to taking serious measures to prevent any attack on any individual or group and to provide them with adequate protection against any work or activity that might threaten their individual safety or their right to a safe environment as far as possible and within the framework of the law;
3. Respond seriously to any threat to the safety of any individual or group and heed every complaint to ensure their safety and to prevent any violation of their rights without any discrimination;
4. Investigate earnestly all the violations reported herein which occurred in their areas of control, prosecute perpetrators regardless of their affiliations and within the framework of the law, and hold them duly accountable. Additionally, the administration should work effectively to adopt all necessary measures, as much as viable and within the framework of the law, to prevent the recurrence of similar violations.



## 1. KNC Offices Attacked and Set Aflame

The first assault on the KNC headquarters took place at dawn on 25 September 2021. Unidentified persons wrote insulting phrases against the KNC on the walls of one of the offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Party – Syria (KDP-S), a key affiliate of the KNC, which also maintains ties with the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iraq (KDP-I).

The KNC responded on the heels of the attack and published a statement on 26 September 2021. In the statement, the KNC [accused](#) the Revolutionary Youth (RY) of perpetrating the attack, adding that the RY also attempted to set fire to the KNC offices in Qamishli/Qamishlo, al-Jawadiyah/Çil Axa, and al-Malikiyah/Dêrik and threatened members of their affiliated local councils.

Additionally, the KNC demanded that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the military body of the Autonomous Administration, abide by their role as a guarantor of intra-Kurdish talks and ban the RY.

## 2. Attacks on Parties Licensed by the Autonomous Administration

Also on 25 September 2021, unidentified persons set fire to the office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party - West Kurdistan (KDP-WK), which is located in the al-Siyahi neighborhood in the northeastern Syrian city of Qamishli/Qamishlo. Notably, the KDP-WK operates by a license they obtained from the Autonomous Administration. The attack caused material damage only, and no human casualties were recorded.

Investigating the attack, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) reached out to Bijan Ibrahim, the KDP-WK's Public Relations Official. Ibrahim reported that the perpetrators used a Molotov cocktail to start the fire. He added:

"A neighbor residing close to the party office called me around 11:30 P.M. He told me that a fire broke out at the office...I rushed to the location. The Asayish and the firefighters had already put out the fire with the help of neighbors...The damage was only material...Later, we discovered the remains of a [Molotov cocktail] which the perpetrators threw through the window."

Ibrahim stressed that the party conduct their activities within the legal frames of the Autonomous Administration as one of their licensed parties.

The same day witnessed another attack. Unidentified persons threw a grenade at the office of the Kurdistan Democratic Change Party (KDCCP) in al-Hasakah city around 11 P.M. According to officials in the party, which operates within the partisan ranks of the Autonomous Administration, the damage was material only.

### 3. Rudaw Media Network Office Set Aflame

On 27 September 2021, after midnight on Monday, three masked men threw Molotov cocktails at the office of the Rudaw Media Network in al-Siyahi neighborhood in Qamishli/Qamishlo, according to a videotape from a surveillance camera. The attack caused material damage due to the fire that broke out in the facility's first floor before neighbors rushed to put out the fire.

Commenting on the assault, Rudaw network published a statement, saying the attack damaged some equipment and office supplies. Additionally, the network stressed that the attack threatened their employees and their work, as well as violated the freedom of the press in Autonomous Administration-controlled areas. The network demanded that the administration break their silence, act, and refrain from responding passively like they have after earlier attacks; this was the sixth assault on the network's office in Qamishli/Qamishlo.

### 4. Fires in Other KNC-Affiliated Party Offices

The arson at the office of the Rudaw Media Network was not the only attack the city witnessed that day. On the same night, unidentified perpetrators attempted to set fire to the offices of the KNC-affiliated Kurdistan Democratic Unity Party (KDUP), located in the Munir Habib neighborhood in central Qamishli /Qamishlo. Importantly, the two targeted offices are geographically close, which makes it likely that the two attacks were carried out by the same perpetrators.

To gain additional details on the night's attack, STJ spoke to Salma Suleiman, a leader of the KDUP, which is chaired by Faslâh Yousef. Suleiman told STJ that three persons on a motorbike—also suspected of carrying out the attack on the Rudaw office—threw a Molotov cocktail at the party's door around 11:45 P.M. Suleiman added:

“The fires consumed the flags of Kurdistan and the party, which were hoisted in front of the office. The damage was only material and fortunately the fire did not reach the office's interior...We condemn this action. The concerned authorities that administer the region must pursue and investigate the matter, especially since the Internal Security Forces (Asayish) checkpoint is set up close to the office.”

There was a third attack that night. A similar assault targeted the office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) on the Bank Audi Street in Qamishli/Qamishlo. Party officials stated that the damages were only material.

## 5. Journalists Speak Up

On 25 September 2021, journalist Ivan Hassib published a [statement](#) on his Facebook page addressing the public. Hassib said that he has been a constant target because of his work in the media in the Autonomous Administration areas in northeastern Syria.

He added that he had filed a complaint against some of the campaigners, which are licensed by the Autonomous Administration and operate in their areas, but no action was taken against the campaigners to stop their activities. Previously, Autonomous Administration loyalist online pages called for targeting journalists on a published list, including Ivan Hassib, Vivian Fatah, and Fahd Sabri.

Concerned over the worsening situation of media workers in the areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration, Reporters Without Borders Middle East (RSF) published a [statement](#) denouncing the recent violations of freedom of the press in the region and urged authorities to allow journalists to freely practice their profession within a safe working environment.

Moreover, the RSF stressed that journalist Ivan Hassib has been particularly threatened, suffering for years due to violent hate campaigns, and claimed they hold local authorities fully responsible for his and his family's safety.

## 6. The Obligations of the Autonomous Administration to the Repeated Attacks

Mass attacks on journalists, media offices, and party headquarters jeopardize several individual and collective rights the Autonomous Administration has pledged to provide and protect, as well as prove the administration's failure to act upon the obligations they bound themselves to in the Constitution of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria—officially titled Charter of the social contract in Rojava (Syria) (Hereinafter the Charter).

According to the Preamble—which the Charter considers an “integral part of this contract”,<sup>1</sup> the administration seeks to “materialize justice, freedom, and democracy...with mutual understanding and coexistence within diversity”,<sup>2</sup> viewing their territories as “open to the forms of compatibility with democratic and pluralistic traditions, to enable all social groups,

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<sup>1</sup>“Charter of the social contract in Rojava (Syria),” Kurdish Institute <https://www.kurdishinstitute.be/en/charter-of-the-social-contract/> (Last visited: 18 October 2021). The Charter first appeared in Arabic on the PYD's Website, 6 January 2014 <https://pydrojava.org/%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A/?fbclid=IwAR14ZvAggYsZnh5MYMnKLO-2hLy3inuALoGxlvZs24szlI2UHVn6i1AZmY>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Article 1.

cultural identities, the Athenian and national to express themselves through their organizations.”<sup>3</sup>

The administration based their vision on the Charter’s Article 6,<sup>4</sup> which states that “[a]ll members and democratic autonomies are equal in front of the law in their rights and duties” while stressing, in Article 21,<sup>5</sup> that “freedom [is] the most precious thing that human individuals and groups own” pledging to ensure human rights and supreme values in accordance with international covenants and conventions.

Furthermore, the administration “recognize[s that] the covenants and international conventions for human rights are an essential part and complements this contract” in Article 20,<sup>6</sup> hinging their activities particularly on “the International Bill of human rights, the International Covenant on Civil and political rights and the cultural, social, economic and other relevant instruments” as shown in Article 22.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, the Autonomous Administration— as the governing authority in their territories of control—are responsible for ensuring the security and safety of all individuals in those territories, in addition to safeguarding their rights and freedoms, especially those they pledged to abide by in the Charter.

To fulfill their obligations under international human rights law and within the principles of the rule of law, any state or legitimate authority must recognize two sets of duties—passive and active—towards individuals and groups within their areas of control or under their authority regarding basic rights and freedoms. Pertaining to the “passive duties,” authorities must not interfere with or prevent these individuals and groups from exercising their legitimate and legally stipulated rights. As for the “active duties,” authorities are obligated to intervene to enable, support, or protect these individuals or groups and their rights, against any violation or interference by any other party that may hamper their exercise of those rights and to ensure that they enjoy their legitimate rights within the framework of the law.

Drawing on Article 18 and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which address the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion,<sup>8</sup> the administration in the Charter’s Article 24 has committed themselves to ensuring that “Every individual or group has the freedom of opinion, thought, conscience, and expression of itself, as long as they do not . . . endanger civil peace”,<sup>9</sup> affirming, in Article 33 and 35 respectively, that they

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, the Preamble.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,”

Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 23 March 1976, in accordance with Article 49, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx> (last accessed: 18 October 2021).

<sup>9</sup> “Charter of the social contract in Rojava (Syria),” Kurdish Institute

<https://www.kurdishinstitute.be/en/charter-of-the-social-contract/> (Last visited: 18 October 2021). The Charter first appeared in Arabic on the PYD’s Website, 6 January 2014

guarantee “freedom of media, press, publishing” and that “[e]veryone is free to access to information, knowledge and artistic activities.”<sup>10</sup>

Also drawing on Articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which respectively establish the “right of peaceful assembly” and the “right to freedom of association with others”,<sup>11</sup> in the Charter’s Article 34, the administration recognizes that “[c]itizens have freedom of expression and peaceful protest and strike in accordance to the law.”<sup>12</sup>

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<https://pydrojava.org/%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A/?fbclid=IwAR14ZvAggYsanh5MYMnKLO-2hLy3inuALoGxlvZs24szll2UHVn6i1AZmY>

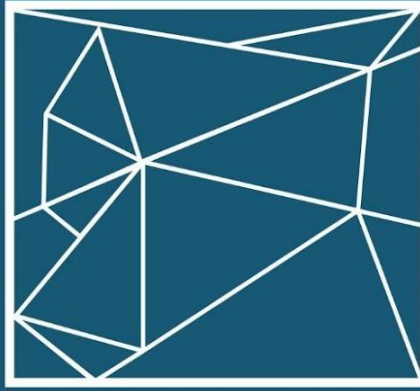
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 23 March 1976, in accordance with Article 49, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx> (last accessed: 18 October 2021).

<sup>12</sup> “Charter of the social contract in Rojava (Syria),” Kurdish Institute <https://www.kurdishinstitute.be/en/charter-of-the-social-contract/> (Last visited: 18 October 2021). The Charter first appeared in Arabic on the PYD’s Website, 6 January 2014 <https://pydrojava.org/%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A/?fbclid=IwAR14ZvAggYsanh5MYMnKLO-2hLy3inuALoGxlvZs24szll2UHVn6i1AZmY>



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## History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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