



## Information dossier

# The extra-legal execution of Kongra Star activists on June 23th in Helince village, Kobane



Kongra Star

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## What happened?

Armed Turkish drones launched an air strike on June 23 on the village of Helincê near Kobanê. The target was a house in that village. The bombing killed three women sitting in the garden: Zehra Berkel, Hebûn Mele and Emîna Weysî. The attack took place at about 19.30 local time.

Drone attacks are selective attacks, aiming directly and specifically at the target after specifying the coordinates. That tells us that the killing of the three women was entirely intentional. Turkey killed three civilians, two of them members of the women's movement, who were involved in the struggle to improve the lives of women in the North and East of Syria and in the Middle East, and one was the owner of the house.

The airspace over Kobanê is under Russian control. The illegal execution of women civilians by means of an armed drone carried out by the Turkish state was therefore carried out with Russia's approval.

The killing of civilians is considered a war crime under International Law and International Humanitarian Law, established in 1998 by the Rome Statute. The murder of Zehra Berkel, Hebûn Mele Xelîl and Emîna Weysî is therefore a war crime committed by Turkey with Russia's complicity. The assassination has also been made possible by the passivity of the United States, which has bases in northern and eastern Syria and has military agreements with Turkey, and also by the international community, which has taken no action in this regard.



## Who are the murdered?



**Zehra Berkel** was a coordinator of the women's umbrella organisation Kongra Star for the Euphrates region. She was born in 1987 to a family from Kobanê and studied law in Aleppo in 2013.



**Hebûn Mele Xelîl** was also a coordinator of Kongra Star in the same region. She was born in 1979 in the village of Pêndir near Kobanê and suffered from cancer.



**Emîna Waysî** lived in the house that was attacked by the Turkish drone and she took part in all activities of the women's movement, as well as she was the mother of another woman of Kongra Star's coordination. She was born in 1965 in the village of Helincê near Kobane and was the mother of five children.

## **The umbrella organisation Kongra Star**

Kongra Star is an umbrella organisation of women's organisations in Rojava. With this umbrella organisation, women try to develop a free Rojava, a democratic Syria and a democratic Middle East by striving for the freedom of all women, following the concept of the democratic nation. Kongra Star began its work in 2005 under the name Yekitiya Star with the organization of the women's movement in Rojava and Syria. For a while the organization worked in secret under the Baath regime and faced many difficulties. At the beginning of the revolution, Kongra Star was at the centre of social organisation and has since then continued to grow as a movement. The association focuses on all areas of women's life, including education, art, self-defense, economy, media and social organization. One of the points to highlight is the presence in the field of justice, promoting laws such as the Women's Act, which was approved in 2014, to increase and protect the rights of women and to ban practices such as forced marriage or polygamy. Linked to justice, as an institution belonging to Kongra Star, are the women's houses, which work against male violence against women in each community and to strengthen the rights granted by raising awareness among the population. After the revolution, more and more women in Northern and Eastern Syria organized themselves and became members of Kongra Star. Within the association, all ethnic groups are independently organized and part of the revolution. In the same way, Kongra Star is organized for and by all colors of Northern and Eastern Syrian women. Evîn Swêd, the spokeswoman of Kongra Star, explains that the women here have organized themselves under such difficult conditions because they saw the need for a common unity. "Under the IS, women in Northern and Eastern Syria were confronted with and overcame the worst atrocities of the 21st century. When the Turkish threat began, it was clear that resistance would be fierce." Kongra Star promotes women's leadership and collective strength. The diversity with which women organize themselves through Kongra Star makes the revolution in Rojava a women's revolution.

## **Kobane**

The city of Kobane is known for its resistance against the Islamic State, which in 2014 occupied different territories and established its caliphate, becoming strong in Syria and Iraq. The defeat suffered by the Islamic State against the YPG-YPJ (the People's Defense Units and Women's Defense Units) in the battle of Kobane, between December 2014 and April 2015, marked the beginning of its decline and opened the way to defeat Islamofascism, which represents one of the greatest dangers to all humanity.

The assassination of Zehra, Hebûn and Emîna took place in the emblematic city, and furthermore, it was carried out precisely two days before the commemoration of the Kobane Massacre, on 25 June 2015. On that day, members of the Islamic State, who had been finally defeated and expelled from the city a month earlier, snuck into Kobane wearing YPG clothing and massacred at least 262 civilians, including 12 children and 67 women, and injured at least 273 other civilians.

The attack on Kobane is no accident. Firstly, because of its symbolic content in relation to resistance against Islamofascism; secondly, to demoralise a population that has already been subjected to so much violence, which has had a great impact both on all the relatives who lost or were injured during the war and on the subsequent revenge committed by IS on the massacre.

## **Recent human rights crimes and attacks on the democracy of the Turkish state**

The violation of human rights and international law by the Turkish state is a continuum. In this dossier we will only show the most recent attacks committed by Turkey especially against women, Kurds and minorities such as the Yazidis and other vulnerable groups such as displaced people.

In the night of 15 June 2020, the fascist AKP/MHP government announced the start of Operation Eagle Claw. During this night, the regions of Shengal and Bradost and the refugee camp Maxmur were bombed by dozens of fighter jets. The Maxmur refugee camp is home to 12,000 people who were forced to flee the Turkish state terror in the early 1990s. During this time, more than 3000 villages in Northern Kurdistan were burned down and the inhabitants were kidnapped and murdered. The refugee camp is under the protection of the UN. The attack on the Shengal region happened 2 days after more than one hundred families returned to their homeland still marked by the IS massacres. They wanted to rebuild their homes and the infrastructure necessary for living there. The air raids were followed by a ground offensive of the Turkish military. Meanwhile hundreds of villages had to be evacuated and people fled to the surrounding cities, which means that they have lost their livelihood.

An operation was also carried out in Northern Kurdistan/Turkey with the intention of political genocide. After the municipal elections in March 2019, elected mayors of the Kurdish municipalities were gradually deposed, many of them were arrested and imprisoned and replaced by forced administrators. They are mainly accused of introducing and unbalancing the principle of co-chairmanship, which the Turkish government considers unconstitutional and terrorist. Meanwhile, 46 of the 65 HDP-governed municipal administrations have been placed under forced administration. According to a recent information dossier of the HDP Women's Council, 41 mayors have been deposed, 21 arrested and 16 imprisoned. At present, 9 mayors are in prison. On 5 June, the Turkish parliament, in a conscientious action and without prior notification of the opposition, decided to withdraw the mandates of Leyla Güven, Musa Farisoğulları and Enis Berberoğlu. The same day, the three politicians were arrested and detained. In the meantime, Leyla Güven and the CHP politician Enis Berberoğlu have been released from prison again. In addition, on 8 June 13 activists of the women's association Rosa were arrested. They are accused of having prepared 8 March demonstrations and of having worked to end violence against women as support for terrorism. The renewed attacks on the political organisation of Kurd women and democratic forces in Turkey began after the HDP announced its "March for Democracy". Starting on 15 June, it nevertheless carried out this march under the most undemocratic conditions conceivable (arbitrary assembly bans and entry bans, threats to participants from snipers on the roofs) and mobilised democratic society on the streets. Finally, the protests of the bar associations drew attention to the situation that free justice should be further curtailed by placing the bar associations directly under the authority of the President of the Republic.

## Specific attacks on women

The specific attacks on women carried out by the Turkish state and by the jihadist mercenary gangs it uses in its expansionist and illegal occupation of the territory of northern Syria are widely documented<sup>1</sup>. The Turkish state is carrying out a femicide both against women in the occupied territories and against organised women who do not accept the system that Erdogan wants to impose throughout the North and East of Syria. Murder, rape, torture, forced displacement...) are all practices outside international law carried out on a daily basis by Erdogan and his mercenaries.

The murder of the three women in Kobane adds to a long list of women killed by the Turkish state or its jihadist mercenaries. Civilian women who had a clear role in politics, who participated in women's and/or democratic organizations and thus broke with the role that the Erdogan regime imposed on the territories under its control.

An example of this is all the women who participated in the democratic institutions of the Autonomous Administration and who have been kidnapped and tortured by the jihadist gangs that control the areas of Afrin, Serêkaniye and Gire Spi.

Another paradigmatic example of how the Turkish state directly targets women who organize to defend their rights, with the aim of scaring and lecturing the rest of the women and dissuading them from participating in politics and organizing themselves to overcome patriarchal violence, is the brutal murder of Hevrin Khalaf.

Hevrin was killed on October 12, when a gang of mercenary jihadists from Turkey assaulted her in the car she was in and brutally murdered her. According to an autopsy report, Khalaf was beaten over her head and left leg with a solid object. This led to multiple bone fractures in the leg. There was then use of sharp objects on the back of her legs. Furthermore, Khalaf was dragged by her hair which caused it to tear off along with bits of flesh. She was then shot in the head once and four more times in her chest. They recorded images of her mutilated body, desecrating it, with a clear aim of scaring the women. Hevrin was the general secretary of the Future Syrian Party, which seeks to democratize Syria, and was known for her diplomatic skills in building consensus and uniting different groups for democracy and peace in Syria.

It should be noted that although women in political life are a special target of the Turkish state, as demonstrated by the specific intentional killings - as evidenced by the recent murder of Zehra Berkel, Hebûn Melel and Emîna Weysî, by means of a drone, or the murder of Hevrin by assaulting her in her car in a similarly selective manner - all women, organised or not, are suffering specific consequences of the attacks by the Turkish state and its jihadist allies, such as sexual violence.

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<sup>1</sup> *Women under Turkish occupation. Femicide and gender-based violence as systematic practice of the Turkish occupation in Afrin*, Kongra Star Statistics and Research Committee Qamişlo and Women Defend Rojava campaign as part of Kongra Star Diplomacy, 2020

## **Our claims**

The Turkish state and its allies are carrying out the most atrocious genocides and femicide in North and East Syria killing civilians and forcing the people to flee in order to end the democratic project and the liberation of women. Therefore, we ask the international community, especially the United Nations, the USA, Russia and the NATO to meet our demands immediatly.

- Official recognition of femicide as a crime against humanity, as well as clarification and condemnation of the femicide practices of states and allied mercenary groups that have begun
- Enforce a ban on armed and unmanned drones
- Close the airspace over northern and eastern Syria.
- Take serious and concrete steps for the immediate withdrawal of the Turkish army and all armed groups connected with it from Syrian territory.
- Establish an international community peacekeeping force on the Turkish-Syrian border.
- Impose sanctions against Turkey and stop the arms trade with the Turkish state.
- Provide humanitarian assistance to the Autonomous Administration region in northern and eastern Syria.
- Allow human rights organisations access to the Turkish-occupied regions in order to monitor the situation on the ground.
- Stop genocidal and feminicidal practices and bring the Turkish state and its jihadi allies to justice for their crimes.
- Establish an international criminal court to prosecute human rights violations and war crimes committed in northern and eastern Syria.



**This dossier has been prepared by Kongra Star Statistics and Research  
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