

**Presentation on the ecological situation in  
Northern Syria & a campaign project  
working to help**

June 26, 2020

This presentation was given online in a seminar organized by Rete Kurdistan, the Kurdistan solidarity network of Italy.

In it, Rete presents how human activities have caused many of the ecological challenges of today in Syria. Including:

- How human caused the desertification of the region.
- How the policies of the Syrian Ba'ath regime are responsible for the many ecological problems of today.
- How the invasion war of ISIS and of the Turkish army and proxies are a threat to both the population and the nature.

Finishing off with sharing the solutions of the Autonomous Administration of North-Eastern Syria and the work of the Make Rojava Green Again campaign in Rojava.

---

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FtAIoZny1U>

---

Merhaba, my name is Heval Goran. I'm part of Make Rojava Green Again campaign here in Rojava. First I would like to thank the organizations for inviting us for this talk and today I will talk about our campaign, Make Rojava Green Again, about our book, but before about the actual ecological situation here in Rojava and in northeastern Syria, in the region of the South. Administration. So first we have to say that this area and the whole Middle East actually is under a lot of ecological threat, like there are some natural threats, but there are most of them are human threats that can that come from the human activities but come also. From the past for from past policies of the bath regime and also about the threat of the war that the region region is on. So first I will talk about the natural threats. Here you can see a map of East Europe and of the Middle East with the with Syria and red, and you can see that in Syria there are different climates. No, the green part is what is called generally Mediterranean climate, even if it's not only places next to the Mediterranean Sea. This is how we call it, which means it's kind of temperate climate, which still has somehow good rain. Which means between 400 to 600 millimeters a year, which is still good. It's a bit similar to Sicily, for example. Like we could, for example, Kobane could be compared to Agrigento, or Catania, who have around 400, five, 100mm a year. So you can see all this region is in green is still kind of OK weather the the difference is that they are like very hot and dry summer. So the the rain is only between October to. April. Well, and the more grey brown yellowish part of Syria is more dry climate arid to semi arid climate where you have in some places less than 200mm of water. Here on this next slide, you can see. Map of the land utilization of Syria so without so much surprise we can see that the agricultural land is mostly in the Mediterranean climate, but also if you can see on the map located next to the Euphrates. River that is coming from the north, from Turkey and is exiting the country S in Iraq. So there are two types of agriculture. There's the groundwater, irrigated agriculture and the river water agriculture, which is mostly situated around the Euphrates river. The other part of the agriculture is mostly rain fed, meaning without irrigation. So 1 interesting question. When we talk about desert, about desertification is was it always like this? Is it a normal climate for the region and most of the time it is not the case like on this map you can see this map of the world is. The situation, environmental, climate and situation 10,000 years ago, meaning right before the development of agriculture by human societies, and you can see here in the. That Syria actually was not a desert. It was a Meadow to step landscape, which means a lot of grass, a lot of grain. This is also why, for example, a lot of grain crops, like wheat, barley are coming from this region.

Actually, this is the origin of those. But also where existing some forests were existing. Some trees here and there also in the more mountainous. Regions and also I wanted just to show you in this map because it's interesting the part in green is like the Sahara desert. Was actually also playing with grass Savannah woodland, which means open forest, but still woodland? No. So what happened actually was that when agriculture started first human society used what we call slash and burn agriculture. They were taking an area. Cutting all the trees and whatever would be there, burn it and then plant directly in the. Which is good because then the ash have a good are good fertilizers for the crops. And what happened was at the beginning maybe they would come back to this place only after 30 years, meaning next year they would go to the next place burn and plant them to another place, then burn and plant them and come back. In the rotation after 30 years, after 30 years. The environment would have recovered and they could burn it again, but what happened was that because of this agriculture developing, bringing more food, also more security to the tribes than their population was getting bigger, meaning they had to grow more food. So what was the solution? This was to burn every year's more frequently, so from 30 years rotation they would get to 15 years rotation to 15 years to five. When you get to five years rotation like the natural environment cannot recover fast enough, meaning it will at some point turn into a desertification process and at the end led to desert by actually the misuse of the land. Exploitation of the land. Too much exploitation at the end. Still about Syria, which is interesting, is that there were still some Woodlands, some forests, not so far ago, actually, until the Second World War. During the Ottoman time, sources showed that the whole region was considered as a good source of wood. So there was wood actually in Syria at that time. So binding from the 16th century onward, what happened was that the exploitation got higher and higher. With the time. And especially after the building of the Baghdad Berlin train station, a train, the roads. Which was using wood for the train and that was culminating at the First World War, when the train after was stopped. But a what happened was the last forest got destroyed during the Second World War, first because of the fight that happened there. But. So because of burn burnt forest, like forest fire. Back maybe 100 years ago, we're still forested in Syria, so it's interesting to have this in mind that actually here today is maybe going to desertification, a lot of ecological challenges, but not so long ago, humans were not affecting so much nature. So what happened actually was that after the independence of Syria. And the coup that brought the bass regime into the into power, the bath regime, and stored some policies that were really affecting nature. So first on agriculture, the bus regime wanted to make the general agriculture increase the product. And so for this they had five years. When they would give papers to farmers which would help the farmers which crops they would be allowed to grow, and if they would not grow it, actually they would get fined or get problems. But on the other hand, when they would do it, they would get like fertilizers, they would get pesticides, they would get. Tractors or any kind of help from the bus? But what was the problem was that they were focusing only on some specific crops, like wheat, barley, lentils, chickpeas, olives, which at the end I kind of a lot of crops, but they were focusing in different region. For example the Jersey region where we are at the moment. It's only wheat fields. It's big monoculture of wheat, while, for example, the Kobani region or the Afrin region especially, is more about olives and cotton. Coban is a bit mixed between wheat and olives. But so yes, so that that brought actually to monoculture in the whole country, which is as we all know like very problematic, like making diseases easier to appear. But also like the whole agriculture more dependent on pesticide, etcetera. And that brought us to the pesticide misuse that happened. Some scientific went to see farmers in the 2000 to see how they were using actually pesticides and also fertilizers and like this and they saw that most, most are farmers. They were using it but without any tactic maybe. Not knowing even the the doors that had to be dissolved or like this and that actually was the cause of a lot of pollution of water, of air, of soil. So this is about agriculture, not about water, because they wanted to get more production production. For agriculture, the bath regime was also subsidizing the drilling of wealth and also they were subsidizing. Diesel. Why diesel? Because the pump to take out the water of the soil are functioning with diesel. So those politics made that thousands of wells were drilled. And so that more water could be used for irrigation. But that had the effect of really, really lowering the groundwater. Labels because the rain, the annual rains

were not able to. Compensate the uptake of water. So, for example, in the region of alep they say that the groundwater tables went down to minimum 60 meters, meaning it's really unsustainable and in the future we'll have big problems about this. To know about the soil. Because of the agricultural practices that were implemented under the bath regime, so like deep, deep flaw or like also not using organic fertilizers, but chemical fertilizers we had at the point that the soil was much more depleted in organic matter was losing a lot of organic matter. And why is that a problem? Because organic matter is the binding agent into inside the soil. Not make it stick together chemically and so when this goes bad then the soil is much more weak and is more susceptible to get eroded both by water and by wind, and so there is also the fact that there are no trees or edge rolls or like this that could protect from the wind. So there is a lot of wind erosion. Then about salination, because of the irrigation technique of the past regime agriculture, we can say still today actually. But what happened is they were using flooding irrigation which is when you just open the water and flood the whole field. The water infiltrates, but at the same time the water also will evaporate and because of this the salt. That are naturally in the water like calcara or stuff like this. They get more and more concentrated and at some point the water cannot have anymore concentration and then they sediment in the soil. Why is that a problem? Because when there is too much salt in the soil, then the plants cannot grow anymore. It's toxic. Now we still have to talk about two important problems we have here is first, the pollution from the industries and from the oil extraction. Well, as you know, the oil extraction is polluting, polluting by itself. No. Also the refinery. But what happened is that during the war. When ISIS was taking control. It then the American and the other coalition were bombing those refineries for petrol and because of the embargo we are not able to import the parts that were damaged and so we are not able to process the oil in a way that to make it at least a bit less polluting. So that makes that the oil that we use in Syria is pretty bad quality and is also like polluting the air, which is also like a threat to human health actually. So this is a big problem. That embargo doesn't allow allow us to fix actually and about the domestic trash is a bit the same like we don't have a good system of separation like this and most of our trash is burned, which is actually also what happens in Europe but after separation. And so, because of the embargo, for the same reason, we cannot develop like separation methods or things like this, which is like a big problem for Syria in general. Then now let's talk about the war impact on nature. First, we have to say that in all regions that were invaded by the fascist Turkish state and its proxies, the they're like mercenaries. They were burning everything and looting everything, meaning like fields. Of crops, but also, for example, if you think of Afrin, they were cutting the olive trees. They were like bringing them, bringing them to. Turkey. They had this politic of destroying everything and bringing everything valuable to Turkey. So a lot of people, they lost their fields like last year also like agents from the Turkish state were like lightning fire into the field of northeastern Syria. And a lot of people lost their crops. At the same time, also, because of the war, like the Turkish state was destroying key infrastructures like electricity industries but also water station like the water Alok, Alok Water Station was destroyed like two or three times. I think last year. Which made, like the city of Hassake, cut from water for a very long period of time. Also the city of Kamisha had some cut because of this. So we can see how Turkey is also using water as a weapon now. And because most of the rivers, actually all of the rivers in our region are coming. From the mountains of Turkey, actually of Baku, of the Kurdistan Region of Turkey. Turkey has built a lot of dams on the border and also before the border, which makes that they control the flow of water coming to Syria and during the war they were like making the amount of water coming to Syria much less also causing problem for agricultural. Practices for a lot of reasons, actually. So we can see how war is really a threat in general to the nature here and to the people. Now, what is all those problems? How are they impacting on the population? We can say that somehow the population, because of all those bath policies, because of the war, got a bit alienated from nature. Just think about it like it's been more than 50 years that those people. Living here. Are not able to control what they are growing on the land that the state was telling them. You do this and you don't think and also somehow it's been 50 years that they live in an environment where they don't see trees actually where they just see that the countryside is a big field of wheat. So when you've

been. Like raised in that situation, you're not even thinking that another way is possible. So yes, there was this loss from the people and loss of their livelihood. Also because of the war, so is also breaking emotionally the people. No. When you lose all what you belong, what it belongs to you. And also there was a loss of traditional knowledge. So like medicinal and edible plants like knowledge from the women and things like this also got lost. What is good is that today like for example, the women's movement. And genealogy are working a lot to recover those those traditional knowledge. But yes still in the in the villages you can find those knowledge which is important to. And then the last thing is a bit that the people have this state mentality where they are a bit waiting that this like a state would provide them everything. And somehow at some point there is a bit lack of initiative, sometime This is why also it is so difficult. To put to practice ecological changes in the country and why it's so difficult for the autonomous administration to to push in that direction. Now, what about the measures taken by the Autonomous Administration of Northeastern Syria? Well, first, about this water problem, this groundwater problem, they forbid the further drilling of wells, which is already a very good first step, although there is still too much uptake. But about agriculture, for example, they are pushing for diversification of the crops. Also, more crop rotations and like this. But again, it's a very difficult thing to bring difficult change to bring because what happens when you tell a farmer that has been working? For a very long time with a certain technique that he has to change everything. So of course it's a long term change. Also what is very good about agriculture is that the enormous administration is pushing for local product. Meaning at the moment, because of the embargo, there is the risk that we get not so much food this year because of the crisis as well, because we cannot import so much because of the fall of the Syrian lira. Sorry, Syrian pound. And so for this self administration was pushing a lot of the people to grow food in their own garden or they were like giving help to them, also pushing for urban gardening in public spaces or like this, for example in commercial, what's happening in other cities as well in Kobane. And so it's very great actually, because it will also lead us to more autonomy related to the outside and also cutting all this very polluting import you know, so this is great on the level of education for example, the self administration like has been publishing books on the topic of ecology. In Kurdish and Arabic. And also they are introducing the ecological topic in the school books as well as, for example, feminism and other topics. And about reforestation, well, that's a big goal of the self administration. And they are trying to reforest in the cities, but also in the countryside both. Actually. And they have like, each city now has a tree nursery which is producing trees, like, for example, the city of Vedic to the small city has a tree nursery that is able to produce 3000 tree every year to plant while other cities. Kesek, which is bigger. Announced last year that they've planted 15,000 trees so each city is having its own tree nursery and pushing in that direction, although of course it is not enough. But that's what we are doing our best because at the end we have to really see that situation. Embargo of almost constant war with all that in consideration, we can say that the measures taken by the self administration are already amazing actually. Now if we move to the second part, so about our campaign, the makers are agreeing again. Campaign was founded in 2018 by the Internationalist commune of Rojava, which was started and built in 2017. And we are following like the. Ideology of social ecology. The theory you can say that was started by Murray Bookchin and then also developed by Abdullah Achala, and we have three goals as a campaign. First education. Then practical word and then the building of international solidarity worldwide. So now about education, you can see here on the pictures. This is our Academy is the Academy shade. Henin cannot chalk is the place where most internationalists coming to Rojava are gathering to get education on. The language on the culture, but also where we have discussions on all different kinds of topics related to democratic confederalism but also ecology. We read together books on different topic. We read makers are arguing. Again. But in parallel to that, we also have this practical side where we also plant trees on the side and participate to the different projects of micro clean. Again, we also clean the surroundings and like the environment like the river down the commune or we plant. Vegetables or like that was the big work of this beginning of the year. So we have those two different sides because we think it's essential that we also work to get connected to the land and also to be more part of nature at the end. Now about the practical work. We have different projects

inside Rojava. Of course we try to support the project of the self administration, but we also run our own. One of them is the reforestation of the Hayakawa Natural Reserve that we do together with the Ecological Committee of the City of Deric. This project started some one year and a half ago, and now we continue on this project to reforest. Then there is the tree nursery at the commune. So each year we try to produce some trees to participate to the efforts of reforestation. We also are now planning to make a repairing buffer near the river down the commune, so this river is already you can see there are some trees around it. But in most places there is no tree. So our idea is to like reforest the whole. River on this whole length and at least starting with the commune place, we've already planted the cuttings. So then this autumn we can start to reforest it actually. Then we have a project together with the municipality of Derek here, like where we tried to push for community gardens. You can see on that picture we were cleaning the riverbed. In Derrick. So then to make a communal park. And that also in three different neighborhoods, we are in contact with them to help them together with the city of Derrick to make community gardens. Then we have our water treatment project. So to reuse the waste water, it's a system of filtering where you can reuse the water for agricultural purposes and then also use the solid material for composting at the end. And this is kind of a project we have on the commune to see if it could be implemented in bigger structures now about international solidarity. Of course, we'll make jargon again, we participate in demonstrations. We are trying to spread the word about the ideology of the revolution, ecology, feminism, radical democracy, and we try to make this spread into the world. So this is one part of it. And this is done through first of all. So in our book you can find an introduction to what is social ecology to what is Democratic confederalism? How is it applied here in Rojava and also what are our goals for the future as a campaign? This is described in our book. And now at the moment we are working on an ebook reader that goes a bit further on the topic of social ecology and democratic confederal. So we took some text from Kurdish people but also internationalists on the question. So this is for people who want to understand better than those systems and what they really propose as an alternative to the capital's modernity. And it should be published on our website, at least in German and English in the next days. So you can check. And so yes, this is one part of our work. And this is where I will finish my presentation. Thanks a lot for participating and listening to me. And yes, if you felt convinced, well, join the revolution. You can take part of it. Or support in general the work of Rojava. And here are the last slide. You can find sources and links our website, our Facebook, our Twitter and also the sources that I used for this presentation. Thank you very much.

## The Library of Unconventional Lives

Presentation on the ecological situation in Northern Syria & a campaign project working to help  
June 26, 2020

<[web.archive.org/.../makerojavagreenagain.org/2020/06/26/presentation-about-the-ecological-situation-in-ne-syria-and-the-make-rojava-green-again-campaign/](http://web.archive.org/.../makerojavagreenagain.org/2020/06/26/presentation-about-the-ecological-situation-in-ne-syria-and-the-make-rojava-green-again-campaign/)> &  
<[youtube.com/watch?v=6FtAloZny1U](https://youtube.com/watch?v=6FtAloZny1U)>

**thelul.org**