

KURDISH LEADERS SPEAK OF THEIR VISION AND ARMENIAN RELATIONS

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By **Hamo Moskofian**, Qamishli, September 2018

Saith Muslim (Saleh Musallem) is a prominent leader of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and a founder of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. By all accounts he is a great friend of  the Armenians!

Q1- *Would you please introduce yourself to our readers and discuss your relations with the Armenians?*

A1- My name is Saith Muslim (Saleh Musallem). I was born in 1954 in Kobani (Ain Arab) built by Armenian survivors of the Genocide. After French colonial rule, it became a prosperous city near the Turkish border.

We grew up with our Armenian neighbors. We went together to school under the bell rings of the three Armenian churches and played with the Armenian children of our neighbors. The elders told us about the Armenian Genocide, the details of which I never forget.

For centuries, we lived together in the Ottoman Empire. The Armenians were famous in industry and trade mainly in the cities while Kurds were peasants in the villages. We were all victims of the Turkish nationalistic state established on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire while the imperial powers at the time, with their dangerous intrigues, were culprits in the genocides of the Armenians, Assyrians, Syriacs, and Pontic Greeks during and after 1915...

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We respect the Armenians and consider them as our brothers in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, and Europe. The ethnic roots are also the same, with the joint struggle against the same enemy. Recently we lost dozens of our youth in order to liberate the Armenian Church in Tel Abiad from the damned Islamic state. Unfortunately, only twelve Armenians attended Holy Christmas Mass in the liberated church... whereas in Tabqa, where there is an Armenian church, following liberation from DAESH, masses and prayers were held in the New Year and Christmas attended by many people.

We will be happy to see our Armenian brothers and sisters return to Qamishli, Kobani and the Al-Jezire region and live together as before.

Q2- *What is your strategy to resolve the problems in Syria?*

A2- We believe in democratic society, self-governance, and respect of all cultures, languages, nations and religions, as are the ideals of Apo-Ocalan. We were victorious against all the forces of evil, headed by DAESH, which was backed by Turkey as it was in the Battle of Kobani! The Baathist regime in Syria does not want any change. We would like to remind that even the Armenians, the Arab tribes, and the Christians who live in the liberated areas are happy of the democratic society we have established. It could be an example for Syria and even the Middle East.

Q3- *Could you comment on your relations with the International Coalition Forces and reaction to the no-fly zone?*

A-3 The International Coalition Forces, realizing our seriousness, extended assistance to us. We succeeded in liberating Membij, Raqqa, and Der El-Zor. All Jezire regions are safe today from DAESH. Collaboration with the International Coalition Forces will only be on a military level. The Turks were greatly disturbed by this co-operation. In addition to the Armenian Genocide Question, now they have another serious problem: the Kurds. Turks are ready to kiss the hands of anybody in order the Kurdish nation does not acquire its rights. As you know, for Turkey a good Kurd is a dead Kurd like a good Armenian is a dead Armenian. Anyhow, we became an important factor in Syria and

every solution passes through us.

Concerning the presence of the international Coalition and the US, they came here for their strategic aims. We have ours. We have lived here together, with ancient nations, for a long time and we have the right to choose what is suitable. We are not slaves to anybody and nobody is our master.

Regarding the No Fly Zone in North Syria, the aim is to protect the International Coalition Forces from any surprises by the terrorist organizations and Turkey. The danger is still present after the occupation of Afrin and while Syria is still in turmoil. If the US is looking for friends, it will find none better than us! As you know, there was an "exchange" arrangement in the case of Afrin. Now the future of Syria will be decided in Idlib. The future is uncertain.

Q4- *What do you propose to Armenians in general?*

We always extended our hands to the Armenians in Syria, mostly in Aleppo. They preferred to be with the Syrian Regime. We made suggestions to the Armenian political parties in Lebanon and the Armenian State, which (perhaps because of its geographic proximity with Turkey) did not give any clear answer. We believe that our common history and land binds us. The salvation of the kurds will be the salvation of the Armenians!

An Interview With the Co-President of North Syria Self-Governance Democratic Canton of Jezire Executive Committee The Legendary Fawze Al-Youssef



By **Hamo Moskofian**, Qamishli, September 2018

Q- *As one of the main leaders of North Syria Self-governing Canton of Jezire, how do you interpret the recent news that the Syrian regime will enter your territories while we understand that an agreement has been reached in Damascus with your delegation headed by Co-President Ilham Ahmad?*

A- The main aims of the Self-Governing Democratic Canton of Jezire administration are to guarantee freedom of expression and a democratic administration by the nations which live here: Kurds, Armenians, Syriacs, Assyrians, Turkmen, and Yezidis. They, who were oppressed, have the right to free political expression and must enjoy their rights in political, cultural and economic domains. We have lived in peaceful co-existence for the past seven years.

We preferred that negotiations with the Syrian regime take place in a democratic and peaceful way. Our experience demonstrated that military means do not lead to meaningful solutions. Dialogue is the best way to a peaceful solution. We stated that we are open to dialogue with all sides to arrive at

a solution. The recent invitation from the Syrian regime to open a dialogue and negotiations was accepted by us. We organized two committees to discuss the existence of the Self-governing Democratic Canton of Jezire. The dialogue did not lead to negotiations because the Syrian regime is not ready to take positive steps for a serious change. It insists on the 2011 statement which does not correspond to the changes that have occurred in these turbulent times. In addition, the regime refused the self-governance and non-centralized propositions tabled by us. In addition, it is unclear whether northeastern Syria will participate in the Syrian elections. We are clear in our demands: If the rights of everyone is not guaranteed, we will not hand anything to the regime. The other point we concentrate on is the elections that will take place on Sept. 19. If we do not reach an agreement, there will not be elections in the North Syria Self-governing Canton of Jezire. We had already organized municipal elections, and there is no need for another election. If we do not arrive at a political solution, we cannot co-operate with the Syrian regime. So far, there has been no agreement and what we need are dialogue and negotiations. We know that the Syrian problem has regional and international implications. It needs time and effort to be resolved. We cannot jump prematurely to resolve problems that we have inherited from past decades and even centuries! We have the necessary political wisdom to realize that such complicated issues cannot be resolved overnight.

Q- *USA president Trump often threatens to withdraw his troops from North Syria. However, as we saw in Erbil, Rmeilan and Der El-Zor, there is the powerful US and international military alliance present. Democratic Syria, the Kurdish and Syriac forces need an aerial umbrella to defend against possible Turkish airstrikes. Do you consider the threats of President Trump serious?*

A- The Syrian crisis, from the beginning, turned to be an international rather than just a local conflict. There has been no political solution until now. Also regarding the US presence like others in the region. In my opinion, if there is no political solution on the ground, none of the forces can withdraw from Syria. We rely on ourselves knowing well that the political situation can change at any moment. We will maintain our relations with all sides to ensure our rights. We rely on ourselves and try to play a balanced role to continue our existence.

Q- *What is your message to our readers and politicians who follow events in Syria?*

A- The nationalist state did everything to destroy the national identities of Kurds, Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, Yezidis, Turkmens, and other groups. In the past seven years, through self-governance, we accomplished what was not achieved in the past 70 years. It concerns the essential rights of every nationality and culture---Armenian, Kurd, Syriac, Assyrian... It enriches our ethnic presence, our life. This co-existence and our North Syria Self-Governance also played a great role in preventing new massacres and the century-old genocides.

Although there are many intrigues by different nationalists intended to divide and weaken our joint efforts, we have a common destiny and the Armenians, Syriacs, Assyrians, Kurds are the oldest nations who have inhabited these lands. Their languages and traditions must be equally respected

by everyone. The challenges are great, but with joint efforts, we will overcome all difficulties.
