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Via Trustee/Founder/Director Margaret Owen OBE
Widows for Peace through Democracy

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PEACE IN KURDISTAN

**WOMEN'S ALLIANCE
FOR KURDISTAN, IRAQ AND SYRIA**

The Rt Honourable Theresa May MP
10 Downing Street

1 September 2016

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing to ask you and the British Government to condemn the recent shelling of majority Kurdish areas near to Jarablus in northern Syria, since 24th August 2016, by Turkish State forces. This is a shocking and deeply disturbing attack on the forces which have consistently been acknowledged as the most effective force on the ground in the battle against ISIS. According to the official statements from the Turkish government, the offensive, "Euphrates Shield", is aimed at both ISIS and the Kurdish People's Defence Units (YPG). From the outset it was clear that the primary focus of this operation was to be Kurdish forces including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and not ISIS. There have been consistent reports of Turkish State complicity with ISIS, by, for example, allowing fighters to cross the border into Syria and of supplying military equipment, as reported for example, in the Washington Post on August 12th 2014. It appears that Jarablus fell to Turkish forces without there being any ISIS casualties.

Since 29th August 2016 the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) and several other media outlets have confirmed that Turkish airstrikes and tank shelling has killed at least 40 civilians in the village of Bir/Jubba al-

Kusa 13 km south of Jarablus, a village previously liberated by the SDF from ISIS.

Hours after the massacre in Jubba al-Kusa another 20 civilians were killed and 25 wounded in Turkish air strikes near the town of Al-Amarneh. According to SOHR, at least four Kurdish fighters had been killed and 15 injured in Turkish bombardments of the two areas. It is clear that this attack on democratic, primarily Kurdish forces will continue as long as the US-led International Coalition remains silent.

The ISIS military campaign has been characterised by a brutal catalogue of sexual violence primarily against women. The widely documented mass abduction of women and girls for sexual violence demonstrates ISIS's view that women are the spoils of war, and was among the factors which led the British Parliament and the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry to conclude that a genocide had occurred of the Yezidi people in Iraq.

In stark contrast to this victimisation of women has been the Kurdish women's defence units, which have been in the frontline of the fight against ISIS. The Kurdish women's movement has been developed over two decades amidst the struggle for Kurdish liberation. Women have emerged at the forefront and are an outstanding example of women's self-determination and self-defence in the Middle East, a region often lagging behind in progressive gender policies. Women make up 50% of the fighting force, over 40% of elected representatives in the Kurdish autonomous region of Rojava and within their political parties in Syrian and Turkish Kurdistan.

Rojava has given refuge to 1.8 million Internally Displaced People and refugees, from across the region, of all ethnicities and religions, of whom 80% are women and children, including many of the Yezidi women and girls who have escaped the genocide underway in Iraq.

Given the UK Government's stated commitment to working to prevent sexual violence in conflict, in particular, at the high profile Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, in London in 2014, we wonder where is the government action on this? We suggest that it is imperative, in order to further this stated aim, that support be given to the women of Rojava in Syria who are at the forefront of the fight against ISIS now. The Rojavan social contract, its constitutional document, guarantees equality in all walks

of public and private life, makes the co-chair system (one man and one woman as joint chairs of any political or civic body) legally binding, and prohibits polygamy, child marriage, forced marriage and bridal dowries. Any true commitment to supporting the advancement of women and in preventing sexual violence in conflict will begin, in the present context, with supporting the women of Rojava in their struggle.

The US-led coalition against ISIS has, until now, supported the major contributions to the struggle by the women and men of the YPJ (the women's units) and YPG and has provided air cover for their operations. However the US and Germany have now flipped sides and declared their support for Turkish airstrikes against them. This invites the accusation of treachery.

Turkey has been accused of committing war crimes against the Kurds inside its borders and has refused to allow UN teams to investigate these allegations. It is now slaughtering civilians inside Syria in full view of western governments and of NATO.

We call on you and the British Government to take a principled stand against the Turkish offensive against the YPG/J, to support the women at the forefront of the struggle against ISIS rather than appease a State which has collaborated with Salafist groups, and to take all necessary measures to protect civilians in the north of Syria from this new attack.

We, the undersigned, look forward to your urgent response.

Peace in Kurdistan

Campaign for a political solution of the Kurdish Question

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