

# Here is how Kurdish organisations have responded to protests in Iran

by Meghan Bodette - 03/01/2018 11:46



As protests continue for the sixth day in cities across Iran, Kurdish political parties in Rojhelat, or East Kurdistan, have called on their supporters to join the demonstrations and support the struggle for political change.

The Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) issued a [statement](#) arguing that the supposed economic reasons for the protests are tied to a need for fundamental political change and challenging accusations of foreign incitement. “The only goal of connecting the dissent of the people to outside forces is to suppress the protests...standing and organizing together is very important for the peoples of Iran and the forces of democracy. As PJAK, we are calling on the Kurdish people and all the peoples of Iran to the ranks of the struggle for freedom,” the statement concludes.

A KCK statement [mentioned](#) the protests alongside recent anti-corruption demonstrations against the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq as examples of the “desire for a free and democratic life,” in the Middle East. KCK-aligned Eastern

Kurdistan Women's Movement (KJAR) [called](#) on the women of Rojhelat, and all of Iran, to join the protests. In a later statement, they [referenced](#) the women's resistance and leadership in Raqqa, Kobanê, and Shengal, saying that "in Rojhilatê Kurdistan and Iran, the regime will be overthrown by women's struggle."

The Kurdistan National Congress [acknowledged](#) religious, political, and economic oppression in Iran and said that Iran's Kurds, along with all other people who have joined the protests, should support each other in order to continue the struggle, claiming that "that the uprising and protests of the people of Iran are legitimate and we support them. People who advocate democracy must support each other and unite, so that they can find alternatives."

The Democratic Part of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), Iran's oldest Kurdish opposition group, also [called](#) for "all revolutionary people of Iran" to join the demonstrations, asking demonstrators to remain peaceful unless violence was needed for self-defense and calling on the security forces, especially those in Rojhelat, to refrain from harming the people.

Secretary General of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan Abdullah Mohtadi [said](#) that demonstrators were "targeting the 'dictator' Rouhani, corrupt officials, foreign policies & almost everything the regime stands for," and that the protests "deserve firm support." Komala and PDKI posted a joint [message](#) urging the international community to support the protestor's demands.

In a recent [interview](#), Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) commander Hussein Yazdanpaneh also asked for international support for Iran's Kurdish population, and said that that PAK supports the protests against "totalitarianism and oppression."

PJAK, Komala, PAK and PDKI all have armed contingents active around Rojhelat which have clashed with Iranian security forces in recent years. None of their statements have called for protestors to arm themselves or join with any armed Kurdish group. Rather, they focus on civil protest and ask supporters to join with other democratic or revolutionary forces in Iran to effect change for the country as a whole.

These statements echo the message of the chants on the streets in Kermanshah, Sandanaj, other parts of Rojhelat, where demonstrators took a more political line earlier on than those in some other cities. Kurds, like Iran's other minorities, have been repressed both under the Islamic Republic and the Shah's monarchy. Their social and economic grievances are directly linked to the state's political choices—as seen in the aftermath of November's earthquake, where aid was slow to reach Kurdish cities and where poor infrastructure increased the devastation.

Unemployment in Kurdish provinces is higher than in other parts of Iran, and housing and employment discrimination are rampant. Those who criticize this oppression face imprisonment and public executions.

These longstanding injustices are the reason why Iran's armed Kurdish opposition exists—and why their solutions call for systemic change, and not mere reform. Many of this week's protestors— from a variety of backgrounds across the country—now call for the same.

The Iranian government, in turn, has arrested hundreds of protestors and killed at least 21. Iranian officials **threatened** the protestors with execution for “waging war against God.” According to PDKI, cell phone users in Kurdish regions have **received** text messages warning them to avoid protests or face the consequences. To the government, the protests are the result of foreign meddling, and protestors agents of outside powers trying to weaken the state.

Yet as many observers note, the protests lack clear leadership and are made up of mostly **youth** and the working class. They have clear and understandable grievances, and it denies their agency and right to freedom to say that they protest only because outside powers tell them to. Calls for international *support* are not the same as calls for outside aggression or intervention—neither of which any political organization supporting the demonstrations has called for.

Watching the response of Kurdish groups—as the most organized and politicized of Iran's minorities—shows an emphasis on the protests as an *internal* struggle that should work towards the benefit of all of the country's oppressed peoples, and that should fight social, political, and economic inequality without imposing the will of outside powers. While their struggle is not as prominent in Western media narratives of the region as the Kurdish cause in Iraq, Syria, or Turkey is, their view of and involvement in Iran's protests should be considered when analyzing the causes and possible solutions.