



ASSAULTS ON WOMEN BY THE TURKISH STATE IN KURDISTAN

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Introduction

In today's conjuncture of the Third World War through which redesign of the Middle East is being discussed, Kurdish People, by their struggle of freedom and equality, once again have brought the question of 'status' to the agenda of the world. The Democratic Autonomy System to be achieved by the equal, free and voluntary union of the peoples, cultures and faith/religious groups, proposed as a model of resolution by the Leader of Kurdish People, Abdullah Öcalan, has been perceived as a threat against the totalitarian politics of nation-states and the regional interests of global capital. Despite this, Kurdish Freedom Movement, with its **perspective based on the women's liberation, ecology and democratic autonomy**, endures in the Middle East for almost half a century now as a secular transformative steady dynamic under the women's lead. The self-interested and totalitarian politics of global capital in the Middle East today is conducted by way of AKP rule, which has terminated the 'peace and dialog process' ongoing since 2013 between the Turkish State and the Kurdish Freedom Movement, against the Kurdish people and women in particular, in the form of genocide politics exceeding the level of war crime in Northern Kurdistan. AKP government dreams of establishing hegemony in the Middle East and developing its expansionist and colonialist strategies, by attacking the land of Kurdistan divided in four parts, with militarist, sexist, nationalist and sectarian politics. It aims to mislead the international community by addressing the rightful struggle of the **Free Women's Congress (KJA)** and other democratic societal forces in Kurdistan for living in an equal, free and dignified system of democratic autonomy, under the banner of counter-terrorism, and criminalizing the economic, political and social self-defense of women by securitist discourses.

Within this context, the KJA structure and peoples of Kurdistan, resist the totalitarian state violence and terror by their perspective of a pluralist system of democratic confederalism and the endeavor of building its mechanisms for self-government. This confederal structuring built by the women aims for systematization of a democratic and free life as opposed to the capitalist male monopoly. Women's collectivism, sociality and institutionalization under the umbrella of KJA, represents the union of women, peoples, identities, faiths and religions, communities, cultures, languages, and nature against the destruction and extermination attempts embarked by the male-dominated system. In women's confederal system, the self-defense of women against political, social, and cultural assimilation, relies on neighborhood communes, neighborhood assemblies, women's academies, production cooperatives, conciliation committees based on gender equality, and woman's solidarity centers struggling against all forms of violence, including sexual harassment, rape, early marriage, and polygamy. Women organized as assemblies come together under the umbrella of KJA. Not only the women's neighborhood based organizations, but also the women from mixed gender organizations, such as, local governments, political parties, NGO's, and culture and faith groups, which successfully employ 50% co-representation system at all levels, gather under the congress umbrella.

Besides the abovementioned efforts for building self-government in education, justice, health, production and public order, based on the equal and democratic participation of women, another significant gain of the women's organized struggle in the dialog process was that, in January 2015, **the KJA Coordination has also joined in the Delegation** to sit at the negotiations table to be setup. This gain at the same time came by virtue of Mr. Abdullah Öcalan, who regards women's freedom

and struggle as the most fundamental element in democratization of a society, and his insistence on the impossibility of a just and lasting peace without equal representation of women.

Escalating Violence and Oppression: Approaching Civilian Coup D'etat

The public announcements made by both the societal dynamics from Turkey and Kurdistan, and the Kurdish Freedom Movement which has declared 8 unilateral ceasefires since 1993, as well as the Turkey-wide conducted survey and research results, demonstrated that peoples showed a high level of support to the dialog process. Despite this support, however, AKP government approved a new Internal Security Law just then, and speeded up the construction of **police stations, 'kalekol's (fortified castle-like military outposts), and security dams** to fill the vacated guerilla areas in Kurdistan. As a continuation of colonialist policies to bring the geography of Kurdistan under military control, these interventions targeted eradication of the women's confedereral system, which has been growing in volition and organizational power by expanding its self-government and self-defense areas. 'Security' towers constructed in the midst of residential areas, state forces patrolling the neighborhoods all day under the guise of security, and harassment and control that breach the inner courtyards, have been experienced as severe assaults on women's sociality. Harassment by soldiers restricted women's mobility. Yet, women have responded to these pressures by escalating their resistance and pioneering the protests in many provinces and districts organized against construction of the *kalekols*. State security forces, in those instances, have brutally targeted the local people to slaughter many of them. The 'security' dams, which lead to ecological and social destruction, have drowned the production areas created by the system of women against the male monopoly. They drew borders between families and communities, and forced the villagers to migration.

In order to realize its dream of a totalitarian, sexist, sectarian and militarist Syria under the AKP lead, the government criminalized the international support, as well as the support from Northern Kurdistan given to the resistance of people in Rojava waged against ISIS, under women's lead. AKP pointed at the organization in the North, in addition to all organizational power and solidarity among the Kurds, as justification for returning to its denial and extermination politics. With that, and in parallel to the ongoing 'dialog' meetings, Erdoğan entered in preparation of a comprehensive war and genocide plan in September 2014, which later on came to be publicly known as the '**Çöktürme Planı**' (literally: Plan to bring [*Kurds*] to the knees). The plan proposed that:

"Special police forces, special martial commandos, and army forces will launch operations on neighborhoods and premises by means of blockades. Provincial Gendarmerie Command will serve as the operations centre for these incursions. The premises and residential areas under blockade will be torn down so that conditions of return are eliminated. The residential areas will be pacified through mass destruction, detention and evacuation. In the suppression operations, around 15.000 people will be killed, 8.000 will be wounded, 6-7.000 arrested, and 150-300.000 displaced..."

The increasing support for HDP observed in the public surveys in the aftermath of the 28 February 2015 Dolmabahçe Agreement, as well as anticipation of HDP passing the 10% threshold in the coming June 2015 elections, signalled AKP to turn the dialog table upside-down, and start implementing its war concept de-facto by initiating comprehensive arrest operations and bomb attacks on HDP, the Kurdish people and their politicians. However, with its 50% equal representation and co-chair system, and election campaign centred on the 'Democratic Autonomy Program' which

demands equal status for peoples and women, HDP got **13,1% of the votes** and won 80 parliamentary seats, **32 of which were held by women**. With 40% women deputies from different cultures, beliefs, and identities, HDP also hit the highest rate of woman's representation ever achieved by a political party in the history of the republic. AKP government, losing the majority, adopted as a fundamental policy of threatening the public with a language of dirty war and tension in the months leading up to November 2015 elections. This policy at the same time included serious attacks on the rights and freedoms of women. Despite the war, terror, censor, and fear mongering politics of the government, however, HDP passed the 10% threshold once again, to win 59 seats in the parliament, **24 held by women**. Even though AKP won the majority in the parliament, it could not achieve the number of deputies necessary for a regime change towards a presidential system, and drew the country into a new and bloody era of chaos.

The Self-Government Practice and State's Perception of it: politics of war, genocide and migration against the women and their living places

In summary, AKP **terminated the peace talks by renouncing the Dolmabahçe Agreement**, jointly prepared by the state officials and HDP deputies, which suggested a road map for transition to the negotiations. It enhanced the assaults and arrestments directed at the women, youth and political dynamics in Turkey's Kurdistan who pursue a struggle along the women's liberation axis. In the meantime, all dimensions (health, law, education, self-defense, economy, ecology, etc.) of a democratic autonomy system based on a women emancipatory, ecological, just, and equal life, which defends the right to self-organization of even the smallest dissimilarity, were progressively being realized through the assemblies and communes of the self-government areas. In order to counter the arrestments, extrajudicial executions, and horrendous state interventions targeting the communal life being realized, the youth commenced a **struggle for defense in the neighborhoods of themselves and their people**. The local people employed the method of digging ditches with a reflex of self-protection against the political and military attacks aiming to destroy their democratic communal life. The state serviced these **ditches for self-defense** to the media as a justification for its military attacks aiming at total extermination in the blockade areas, even though it has taken that genocide decision long before, when constructing *kalekols* and security dams, and preparing the '*Çöktürme Plan*' (Plan to bring the [Kurds] to the knees).

While reactions by the Kurdish people against these genocidal policies were on the rise, diverse cultural and faith communities, and all sections of society including the women, announced over declarations with similar content that **they have approved the self-government strategy in Kurdistan**, confirmed their approval to the state via the last local and general elections, and that they will be persistent on their demand. Local governments, NGO's, congresses, political parties, and groups from education, health, law, economy, ecology, and political areas in Kurdistan, reiterated their support for the Dolmabahçe Agreement and called for resumption of the resolution process. Soon after these declarations, state forces initiated the arrestments of the KJA members, HDP provincial and district co-mayors, and the youth. Between July 2015 and May 2016, **KJA member 11 woman co-mayors** were arrested, and **17** removed from office. In the self-government areas, **106 women** and **106 children** were slaughtered. **6.142 people** were detained, **1.796 arrested**, and **1.382 sentenced**. By the murder of the **three executive members of KJA in Silopi** and **one in Cizre**, the state clearly targeted the organizational power of women.



Asya Yüksel, co-chair of people's assembly in Cizre; Sêvê Demir, the executive board member of KJA and the party assembly member of DBP; Pakize Nayir, co-chair of people's assembly in Silopi; and Fatma Uyar, also member of KJA, were brutally executed by state security forces.

Initial provocative assaults by the Turkish State targeted the sacrosanct values of the society. Fighter jets, violating both the universal law and the religious jurisdiction, bombarded the guerilla cemeteries and sacred venues. Since July 2015, **7 cities, 22 districts, and 150 neighborhoods and villages**, including, Gimgim (Varto) district of Muş, Ferqîn(Silvan)/Sûr/Lice districts of Amed, Cîzîre/Hezex(îdil)/Silopi districts of Şirnex, Gewer(Yüksekova) district of Colemêrg (Hakkari), Kerboran(Dargeçit)/Dêrik/Nisêbîn districts of Mêrdîn, and all districts of Dêrsîm, experience inhuman treatment under state blockade and embargo. The **64 curfews** declared to date have reached up to **1039 days** in total. State security in Turkey executes these inhuman policies by means of paramilitary-like, racist, sexist, and fascist forces, such as, JÖH (Gendarme Special Forces), PÖH (Police Special Forces), JİTEM (Gendarme Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism), TEM (Counter-Terrorism), and Esedullah Team (team of Allah's lions). War crimes are indiscriminately committed with similar methods in the abovementioned settlements under blockade and embargo. In the face of detailed documenting and reporting to the international community by human rights organizations and lawyers (İHD, THİV, Mazlum-Der, MHD), labor unions (Eğitim-Sen, Sağlık-Sen), municipalities (including the Union of Southeastern Anatolia Region Municipalities (GABB)), congresses (KJA, DTK), and political parties (DBP, HDP), silence of the world against this atrocity is utterly inexplicable.

Excluding certain parts of Gever, Şirnex, Nusaybin, Sur and Cizre which presently cannot be entered, **2.375 housing** and **791 workplaces** are totally demolished. **208.156 people** are forcibly displaced due to total destruction of their living places. In addition to these figures, it is considered that around a **million** people have migrated from the cities under state blockade towards the nearby cities. Local people who do not want to leave Kurdistan are going through a massive internal migration process towards the surrounding cities and districts. Private properties of the people who are resisting the depopulation politics of Kurdistan are grabbed under the guise of '**urgent expropriation**'. In Sur alone, **6.300 dwelling places** are grabbed in this way and **1.000 property shareholders** have not received a response to their formal objections, yet.

Districts/Neighborhoods Under Blockade	District Population according to the 2014 Address-Based Population Registration System	Population Inhabiting the Neighborhoods Directly Affected by the Attacks
Mêrdîn/Kerboran(Dargeçit) District: Saray, Tepebaşı, Bahçebaşı, and Safa neighborhoods	28.891	15.355
Mêrdîn/Nisêbîn District: Fırat, Dicle, Yenişehir, and Newroz neighborhoods	116.068	33.922
Mêrdîn/Dêrik District: Kale, Cevizpınar, Dağ, and Küçükpınar neighborhoods	61.320	14.280
Amed/Farqîn(Silvan) District: Tekel, Mesçit, and Konak neighborhoods	86.633	14.345
Amed/Sûr District: Hasırlı, Cevatpaşa, Fatihpaşa, Dabanoğlu, Cemal Yılmaz, and Savaş neighborhoods	121.750	26.084
Amed/Bismîl District: Ulutürk and Dumlupınar	112.461	11.698
Amed/Lice District: Whole district	26.427	26.427
Amed/Dicle District: Bağlarbaşı neighborhood and all rural areas	40.033	----
Colemêrg(Hakkari)/Gewe(Yüksekova) District: Cumhuriyet neighborhood	68.757	11.900
Colemêrg/Şemizdina District: Whole district	15.739	15.739
Şirnex City Center: Whole city center	112.973	112.973
Şirnex/Cizre District: Nûr, Cûdî, and Yafes neighborhoods	132.857	67.973
Şirnex/Silopi District: Cûdî, Başak, Barbaros, Nûh, ŞHT Harunboy, Yenimahalle, and Turgut Özal neighborhoods	87.150	43.670
Şirnex/Herzax(İdil) District: Whole district	26.511	26.511
Şirnex/Beytüşşebab District: Whole district	5.263	5.263
Total	1.042.833	426.140

Table: Population directly and indirectly affected by the state forces' attacks under the blockade areas, (province and district villages included)



A view from Cizre destroyed and burnt down with tanks and mortars.



Above: A group of women, kins of the wounded in the basement, walking towards the first ‘basement of horror’ in Cizre.
 Below: Women forced to leave their living places.

Sexist assaults of the State

Especially women are subjected to severest of the assaults as a response to their preference to **resist deserting their living places** that they have built with enormous amount of labor. For example, although the women in Cizre gathered their kins and neighbors together and wanted to continue staying in their neighborhoods, they were forced to migrate to the city center when grenades and mortars hit their houses, and state security forces made announcements from the armored vehicles, such as: **“If you don’t leave, we will assume that you are terrorists and shoot”, “We will use chemical weapons”,** etc. Each time they were displaced, they have faced death or arbitrary violence by the soldiers or the police. Women move to places with less risk of clash mostly due to their concerns for children, yet are forced to migrate out of the district when state attacks also hit those neighborhoods. This shows us that, besides the war, a forced migration policy is also in place. Another evidence to the existence of a forced migration policy is that, on their return, people find their homes totally destroyed and burnt down, their stuff shot to pieces (carpets burnt, coaches stabbed, plates broken, walls and furniture with gunshots, white goods axed, etc.). Women’s personal belongings and garments in the bedrooms are particularly targeted. Photos belonging to the

women owners of the house are found placed in the bathrooms. Sexist and racist slogans on the walls and mirrors in the rooms write: “We are here, where are you girls?”, “We will come back, if you don’t behave”, “One garter free for who gets one *fistan* (traditional woman’s dress)”, “Where are the *fistanlılar*? (women wearing dress)”, “Chick’s house”, etc. Personal garments of women scattered all around the house reflects the desire to insult the house owners. The defamatory announcements made in relation to women’s bodies from the armored vehicles of state security forces, and sharing of the naked photos of a murdered woman in Cizre over the social media, intend to spread the fear of rape among women. These observations prove deliberate evidence to the sexist character of the special war and forced migration policy being implemented.



Top left: “This spring, I will clothe you with tanga”, top right: “ TR. (Turkish Republic) has penetrated, where is the skirted?” “We are here, where are the *fistanlılar* (women wearing traditional dress)?”, bottom left: “Love is different in Yüksekova. Guy from Gonya, Beyşehir”, bottom middle: “One garter free for who gets one *fistan* (traditional woman’s dress)”



Despite all these threats, **70% of those remaining** in the blockade areas are women, 30% being young women and children. After the lift of the curfews, security forces still patrol the neighborhoods intensively; arbitrary security checks, as well as, house raids continue. Women wage a struggle to liberate themselves from all forms of exploitation exerted by the male-dominated system by way of **claiming their self-government areas**. In the midst of destruction, and in the face



of power and water cuts still ongoing in many districts, women are striving to reorganize the rooms and houses that still stand up, provide hygiene conditions for living, and reconstruct the sociality of women by reestablishing their neighborhood assemblies. The women in Kurdistan, who inherit and execute

today the world experience of the **woman-oriented communal life dating back to 5.000 years ago**, give hope to the woman's struggle across the world by building its own democratic self-government system as opposed to the capitalist system of male-dominance.



The steadfast struggle of KJA for building self-government and self-defense as a system of women, as opposed to the system promoted by AKP which sacrifices women to male dominated family and the state, shakes the AKP strategy to seclude women both in Turkey and Kurdistan at its core. This conservative mentality leveled at the freedom of women in the last decade has caused serious problems in implementation of the Civil and Criminal Codes and the Law Against Violence; endeavored to enact laws to prohibit abortion and to legitimize rape; and to encourage domestic gender roles to define the position of women in the labor market. The political project of AKP, which aspires to the control of whole society via the control of women and the family, intends to promote and societalize the gender roles that encourage violence against women. The motto, “**Don’t be the slave of woman, but be the master of your family**”, became an official state policy. As a result of implementations, such as, increase in the personal armament level of men, militarist male violence provoked in the blockade areas, forced migration, poverty, seclusion of women at home as free labor, and protection order or divorce getting harder, the murder rate of women in Turkey **increased by 1400%** during the AKP rule. The report prepared by the **Divorce Commission** of the Parliament in order to “**Identify the necessary measures for empowering the family institution**”, and declared to the public on May 2016, suggests abolishing the rights of women and children that were won with great difficulty over the years by the women’s struggle in Turkey. The report approves and recommends policies, like, legitimizing rape and sexual harassment under the guise of the marriage of the perpetrator and the victim, forcing the children to marriage, and prolonging the women’s stay in the violent environment by making divorce harder.

AKP, plans also to discourage the women outside of Kurdistan in Turkey, by turning its military violence and assaults on the Kurdish woman politicians and activists into a media show, designed to discredit the women's struggle. On the ground, on the other hand, it strategies on destroying the organized defense mechanisms of the women via internal war and forced migration. KJA, as the pioneering dynamic of the Kurdish women, obstructs the invasive strategies of state forces, which try to inscribe the bodies of women as a special battlefield. It struggles against the systematic implementation of rape culture under the blockade areas, exposes the sexist policies against women,

resists sexual harassment and rapes, and achieves self-defense based on the volition of women. KJA will never accept the denial and extermination policies of the male dominated state system aiming at total destruction of a peoples and their living places. While we emphasize that we will escalate our struggle against these massacres, we once again remind all states over the world that they stand complicit in this genocide by remaining silent.



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Human Rights Violations in a Society Resisting Blockades:

Dishonorable, Inhuman Treatment, and Invasion of the Right to Life: Heavy weapons used by land and air forces in war situations against the foreign states are being used against the civilian people and their living places. The **64 curfews** declared to date in 1 city center and the 22 districts of 7 different cities comprising tens of neighborhoods, have reached up to **1039 days** in total. **731 people** have been killed in the blockade areas, Cizre, Silopi, İdil, Şırnak, Yüksekova, Nusaybin and Sur, since the beginning (July 2015) of the blockades. As yet, **192 dead bodies** could not have been identified. State officers (soldier, police) attack civilian people as snow masked paramilitary forces wearing no identity cards. Snipers indiscriminately execute people and all living beings moving in the streets. People are forced to migrate by the spread of the news and announcements on the use of chemical weapons. All people, the wounded and the dead bodies in particular, are subjected to dishonoring and inhuman treatment and torture. Derogatory treatment under the pretext of body search continues while entering/exiting the residential areas. Detentions and arrests persist. Arbitrary naked search in prisons are conducted as a form of systematic torture.

Invasion of the Right to Shelter and Forced Migration: While most houses under blockade are totally destroyed, in other urban parts, they are seriously damaged, specially the doors, windows and white goods. Sexist, humiliating and insulting writings are drawn inside the houses, garments are defecated on, and signs and views that will remind the returning of the invasion are left everywhere.

Invasion of the Right to Nutrition: Access to food and water is hindered. Disbursement of aid and sharing of food among the residents are criminalized. Local people are threatened and forced to migrate by the spread of the news that the well water is laced with poison.

Invasion of the Right to Health: State security forces **convert the upper floors** of the hospitals to bases for military operations. While civilian health organizations are declared as terrorists, voluntary health workers are barred from the cities. People striving to rush the wounded to the hospitals are executed along with the wounded, and their dead bodies remain **on the street for days**. The loss of the wounded treated under impossible conditions due to the risk of execution or arrest, on the other hand, causes feelings of failure and guilt in people. State security forces prevent the patients with chronic illnesses from receiving treatment. Women generally tend to suppress their own feelings in order to prevent anxiety in the children, particularly during the children's time of sickness. Pregnant women forced to give birth under unsanitary conditions suffer **miscarriage or dead birth**. Mothers are unable to produce milk owing to trauma. Children cannot receive vaccination. Spread of **contagious diseases**, due to garbage collection disallowed, cannot be stopped. Serious **nutrition and hygiene problems** because of the food, water, and heating embargo cause further diseases. The whole society, children and elderly in particular, suffer from **severe trauma** accruing from the created atmosphere of desperation, heavy weapon shots, dead bodies held on the streets, wounded prevented from medical intervention for extended periods of time, destruction of the residential areas and witnessing of the massacres carried out in the basements. The number of **heart attacks** has increased **600%** according to the Union of Health Workers in Diyarbakır.



Dead bodies kept in the streets in the blockade areas while waiting for an ambulance.
Cizre State Hospital used as a military base during the blockade.

Invasion of the Right to Education: The Minister of Education has called a halt to education with a telephone messages sent to the teachers working in the cities under blockade, saying, “**You are summoned for in-service training**”. While education institutions owned by the local governments are shut down, all state schools are converted into police or military bases. Provocative, sexist, and threatening writings on the school blackboards, such as, “**Now it is our turn to educate you**”, try to impose assimilation. According to the Education and Science Workers’ Union in Diyarbakır, the number of children attending the primary and secondary schools in the neighborhoods of Sur other than those under blockade, has decreased by **53 percent**. **1.128 academics**, who have declared by a petition that they “**will not be a party to this crime**”, face threats and pressure, such as, removal from their jobs, investigations, and arrests. Investigations are launched against thousands of teachers, members of the Education and Science Workers’ Union (Eğitim-Sen), **5.000** in Amed (Diyarbakır) alone, resulting in hundreds being removed from their jobs. Teacher Ayşe, who has connected to a TV show live by phone call and said, “don’t let the children die”, has faced incredible threats and been tried in court.



Schools in the blockade areas are converted into police or military bases .

Invasion of Individual and Collective Rights, and Right to Security, Freedom of Expression and Organization: All attempts to embrace the right to self-government have resulted in detentions and arrest. Since July 2015, over **6.000 people** have been detained, and around **1.800 people** arrested. The offer for constitutional change to lift the impunity of the MPs’ who hold indictments, has been approved by the Turkish Parliament on May 2016. Of the HDP's 59 deputies in parliament, **50** now face prosecution for the **405 indictments** that stand against them. **216** of the cases are based on the allegation of ‘**crime of terrorism**’. In the raids to the institutions in Kurdistan (KJA, DBP, HDP provincial and district organizations, cultural centers, neighborhood, district and city assemblies),

members and executives are **arrested**, and institutional **archives seized**. Detention or deportation of the activists, journalists, and parliamentarians arriving from the Turkish metropolises or abroad demonstrates the fierce **isolation policies** employed against Kurdistan.

Invasion of Right to Justice and Equality before the Law: While Turkey snubs all international conventions as well as individual rights and freedoms referring to its domestic 'Internal Security and Anti-Terror Law', and violates, **the Genocide Convention, CEDAW, Human Rights, Children's Rights, Convention against Torture, Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage and Ottawa and Kyoto Conventions** that it has undersigned, the world remains silent. Despite the applications and debriefing to international courts almost on daily basis regarding the war crimes committed particularly in Cizre, no measures are taken, and the interlocutory injunction granted by ECHR is not recognized by the Turkish State. Postponement of the EU Commission's 2015 Progress Report until after the November 2015 elections, and silence on violations of fundamental rights in return for the **Turkish Government's cooperation on refugees**, create **distrust towards EU** among the Kurdish people. The applications to ECHR remaining inconclusive further foster this distrust.

Invasion of the Right to Communication: Both national and international journalists face unprecedented legal obstacles and arrests, even serious threats to their lives. By the end of 2015, the government has blocked access to over **90 news portals**, media outlets, and websites. More than **23 websites** reporting on issues mostly related to the resolution of the Kurdish question were shut down. Sexist assaults on woman journalists continue. Diyarbakır-based **JINHA News Agency** reporters, consisting solely of women, were taken into custody. Thousands of social media users are sued for defamation. Reminiscent of the 1980 coup d'état period, mainstream media chooses to distort the reality, or stay silent, either due to government threats, or their political/economic allegiances.