

**UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL
09:00 SATURDAY 21 OCTOBER 2017**

First ever conference of co-operatives to be held in Northern Syria

The UK co-operative movement has sent a message of solidarity to its fellow co-operators in the Democratic Federation of North Syria (Rojava) as the first ever conference of co-operatives is held in the region.

This historic event has been co-ordinated by new Unions of Co-operatives which have recently been established in all the cantons and regions of Rojava. The *Solidarity Statement from the UK Co-operative Movement to the First Conference of Co-operatives in North Syria* has been signed by 35 organisations to date, including the Solidarity Economy Association, Co-operatives UK, The Co-operative College, Students for Co-operation, members of Radical Routes and other workers' and housing co-operatives all around the UK.

Jo Taylor, who runs the Solidarity Economy Association's 'Co-operative Economy in Rojava and Bakur' project, was responsible for co-ordinating the Solidarity Statement.

She said: "Support and encouragement for new co-operatives have played a vital role in the transition to a new democratic society in North Syria since the start of the Rojava Revolution in 2012. The democratic, autonomous region has been undergoing a social, political and economic revolution despite, and in some ways because of, the horrific conflict taking place in the country.

"People are taking collective control of their lives and workplaces, and within this system co-operatives play an integral part in reshaping the economy. It's incredibly important that the UK co-operative movement sends this message of solidarity to our fellow co-operators in the region on this landmark occasion.

"We were invited to write a message of support to be read out by a contact in the region, but with very short notice, and it has been so encouraging to receive a barrage of emails from workers', consumer and housing co-operatives and other co-operative organisations up and down the country in support of this statement, despite a very tight time-frame."

A message sent by contacts in the region to the Solidarity Economy Association said:

"Co-operatives [have] become successively a strong element of the economy in Northern Syria, which is developing as a communal and democratic economy according to our political concept

of Democratic Confederalism. Due to the difficult political and military situation in our region there is no opportunity to invite any members or representatives from co-operative movements abroad, or other economical structures of solidarity. We are very sorry about that. However, we are strongly interested to get and stay in contact with the co-operative movements all around the world aiming an economy of solidarity. In this sense we would be very pleased to get a message from you for our important conference!”

The Statement of Solidarity, which can be read in full here [\[insert link\]](#) and is reproduced below, has been translated into Kurmanci, one of the main local languages, and will be read out to delegates during the conference on Saturday 21 October 2017. If you would like to add your name to the list of organisations representing the UK co-operative movement sending this message, please do so by emailing info@solidarityeconomy.coop and putting ‘Solidarity with Rojava’ as the email title.

For more information about the co-operative revolution in Rojava, visit www.cooperativeeconomy.info.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors: Please note the strict embargo on this media release, which is due to security reasons in the region. For more information about the conference, and/or the co-operative economy in Rojava - North Syria, please contact kat@solidarityeconomy.coop / 07810 832980.

Co-operative Economy in Rojava and Bakur (<https://cooperativeeconomy.info/>) is a project delivered by the Solidarity Economy Association and provides the only comprehensive English language information resource on the subject. The aim of the project is to make it easier for those who want to better understand what’s happening in the region to do so, and to learn about the alternative economic changes that are underway.

Solidarity Economy Association (www.solidarityeconomy.coop) (formerly known as the Institute for Solidarity Economics) is a not-for-profit, multi-stakeholder co-operative working to support the growth of the Solidarity Economy Movement. Its core work focuses on education, research and promotion of the Solidarity Economy - an economy that embodies social justice, diversity & pluralism, co-operation, self-management & ecological sustainability.

On the next page: full text: Solidarity Statement from the UK Co-operative Movement to the First Conference of Co-operatives in North Syria, 21-22 October, 2017

Solidarity Statement from the UK Co-operative Movement to the First Conference of Co-operatives in North Syria, 21-22 October, 2017

Members of the co-operative movement of the United Kingdom would like to send our heartfelt solidarity to the first co-operative conference of the Democratic Federation of North Syria.

Many of us have been following developments in the region closely since the start of the Rojava Revolution and we believe we have much to learn from and share with one another.

What is being attempted in North Syria – a transition to a largely co-operative economy during a time of war, economic embargo and instability – is amazing and inspiring, and an example to the world.

The co-operative movement in the UK today owes its existence to the Rochdale Pioneers, a group of working class people in the north of England who came together in 1844 to buy basic foods and open a small shop with collective ownership, to provide basic necessities to people at affordable prices. Customers could also become members of the co-operative, get a share of the profits and take part in making decisions. Workers in nearby towns were inspired by this and the idea began to spread across the country.

Today there are around 7,000 co-operatives in the UK, from consumer co-operatives like the one the Rochdale Pioneers opened; workers' co-operatives, owned and managed by the workers; housing co-operatives, owned and managed by the people who live in them; agricultural and farmers co-ops, and many more.

You, who are gathering together in North Syria today for your first co-operative conference, are the pioneers of your own co-operative movement. Future generations and members of co-operatives in what we hope will be a future peaceful and democratic Syria will look back on this historical moment and learn about what you are doing for the future of your region.

There will no doubt be great challenges and obstacles along the way, especially considering the situation of war, embargo and economic siege that you are facing. However, we believe in the creativity and resilience of the people in your region, and in the power of co-operative organising to create real and lasting change.

(continues onto next page)

When there are needs in society or a community, the co-operative movement has the opportunity to step up to help meet the needs of the people.

We look forward to developing a deeper relationship between members of co-operatives in both our regions and wish all co-operative projects in North Syria the greatest of success and prosperity.

Signed by:

1. Co-operative Economy in Rojava and Bakur research project
2. Solidarity Economy Association
3. Co-operatives UK
4. The Co-operative College
5. Birmingham Bike Foundry
6. Shoal Collective
7. Co-operative Business Consultants
8. Weirdigans Workers' Co-op
9. Unicorn Grocery
10. LEDfantastic
11. Students for Co-operation
12. Cooperantics.coop
13. Bakers & Food Allied Workers Union (BFAWU)
14. Suma Wholefoods
15. Tangram Housing Co-operative, Leeds
16. The Swap and Reuse Hub Co-operative, Edinburgh
17. Out of Town Housing Co-operative
18. Sail Boat Project workers' co-operative
19. Firelight Housing Cooperative (Leeds)
20. Valley Organics
21. Infinity Foods
22. FairShares Association Ltd
23. FairShares Institute for Cooperative Social Entrepreneurship
24. UK Society for Cooperative Studies
25. Social Enterprise International Ltd
26. Wild Things ecological education collective Ltd
27. V3 Power Ltd
28. Wild Peak Housing Co-operative Ltd
29. The Hive Housing Coop, Bradford
30. Co-operative Assistance Network Limited
31. Footprint Workers' Co-operative, a member of the Radical Routes federation of co-operatives working for social change
32. Xanadu Housing Co-operative
33. Leeds Environmental Design Associates (LEDA)
34. Oblong Ltd/Woodhouse Community Centre, Leeds
35. Cornerstone Housing Co-operative, Leeds (a member of the Radical Routes federation of coops working for social change)