

Press release

## **Turkish officials assault and deport British activists on a humanitarian mission to North & East Syria**

Vienna, 2 February 2026

- War in Syria between SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) and STG (Syrian Transitional Government). Kobane is besieged with no electricity, food, water or internet.
- Two British citizens joined the People's Caravan to draw attention to the humanitarian crisis in Kobane.
- Near the Turkey–Syria border, the British citizens were detained by Turkish police (alongside 27 others). The group was violently beaten and then deported to Vienna.

Two British citizens on an urgent humanitarian mission to Syria have been violently beaten by Turkish police, before being deported to Vienna yesterday.

Over the last two weeks, Patrick Thelwell and Skylar Sharples travelled with a convoy of 100 young people from across Europe as part of the 'Caravan in Defence of Humanity'. They had been travelling to Syria to raise awareness of the urgent situation in Kobane, besieged by STG forces, in the Democratic Administration of North & East Syria (DAANES, also known as Rojava). Yesterday, they were stopped near the Turkey–Syria border in Suruç, detained by Turkish police and violently beaten before being deported to Vienna.

Kobane is currently under siege by the new Syrian regime of Ahmed al-Sharaa (formerly known as al-Jolani), in collaboration with the Turkish state and their jihadist proxy forces. There has been little media attention paid to the over 40,000 people who are cut off from water, electricity, and the Internet amidst freezing winter temperatures. Kobane has previously been under siege: in 2014 the SDF fought off ISIS, leading to the liberation of millions in the region from fascism.

On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> January, the STG escalated its invasion of the DAANES in an attempt to crush the Kurdish struggle and erase the many gains made for democracy, multi-ethnic cooperation, and women's rights in the region. This attack is the culmination of a decades-long project of ethnic cleansing carried out by Turkey against the Kurdish people, who are denied the right to speak their own language and face intense political repression by the Turkish state.

Patrick Thelwell said in a statement: "Just as the Freedom Flotilla set off from Italy to attempt to break the Israeli siege of Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid, we have travelled across more than seven borders—by land and air—to break the media silence over the atrocities being carried out in the region, and in particular the role of the UK and EU in propping up the fascist Turkish state, selling them advanced weaponry that is used to carry out massacres of Kurdish people. Furthermore, our governments have played a shameful role in rehabilitating former al-Qaeda leader al-Jolani as a legitimate democratic head of state."

Skylar Sharples spoke about the conditions they endured: "We arrived at the detention centre near Istanbul airport. I was in a group with four other womxn. The first womxn went ahead and we heard shouting from both her and the police. When I followed, I was told that the police had been holding someone by the neck.

When they tried to put us in the cells, we resisted attempts to separate us. The police

grabbed everyone and threw us to the ground. I was on my front and the police started hitting and kicking me, before pulling my arms behind my back and restraining me with zip ties. They dragged me across the floor, lifted me and threw me head-first into the cell; my head hit the tile floor hard as I could not break my fall due to the restraints. They threw another friend inside and she had a very bad concussion due to the police slamming her head onto the ground repeatedly. As the police were leaving the cell, they slapped me again across the face. There was always the threat of violence whenever we were around them. I have injuries—since checked and documented in hospital—to my shoulder, hip and wrists; one of my hands is still numb with possible nerve damage from the restraints.

As we were being led to our cells, an official in military dress had leered at us and said: 'Welcome to Turkey'."

### **Press contacts:**

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Skylar and Patrick: media@kurdistan solidarity.net

Interviews available upon request.

### **End notes:**

**Patrick Thelwell** (they/them) is a 26 year old gardener and a documentary film-maker. They were previously arrested for throwing eggs at the king in protest of the monarchy and British state complicity in Israel's genocide of the Palestinians.

**Skylar Sharples** (they/them) is 27 years old and lives in Brighton.

**The Caravan in Defence of Humanity** is the self-organised European response to the war against the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North & East Syria (DAANES, also known as Rojava). The participants in the Caravan are united in sending a powerful message of solidarity with the resistance in North & East Syria. The Caravan is made up of different delegations travelling along various routes towards the Turkey–Syria border and the besieged city of Kobane. Members of the Caravan came from diverse backgrounds including: medical professionals; members of a European network against femicide; and journalists.