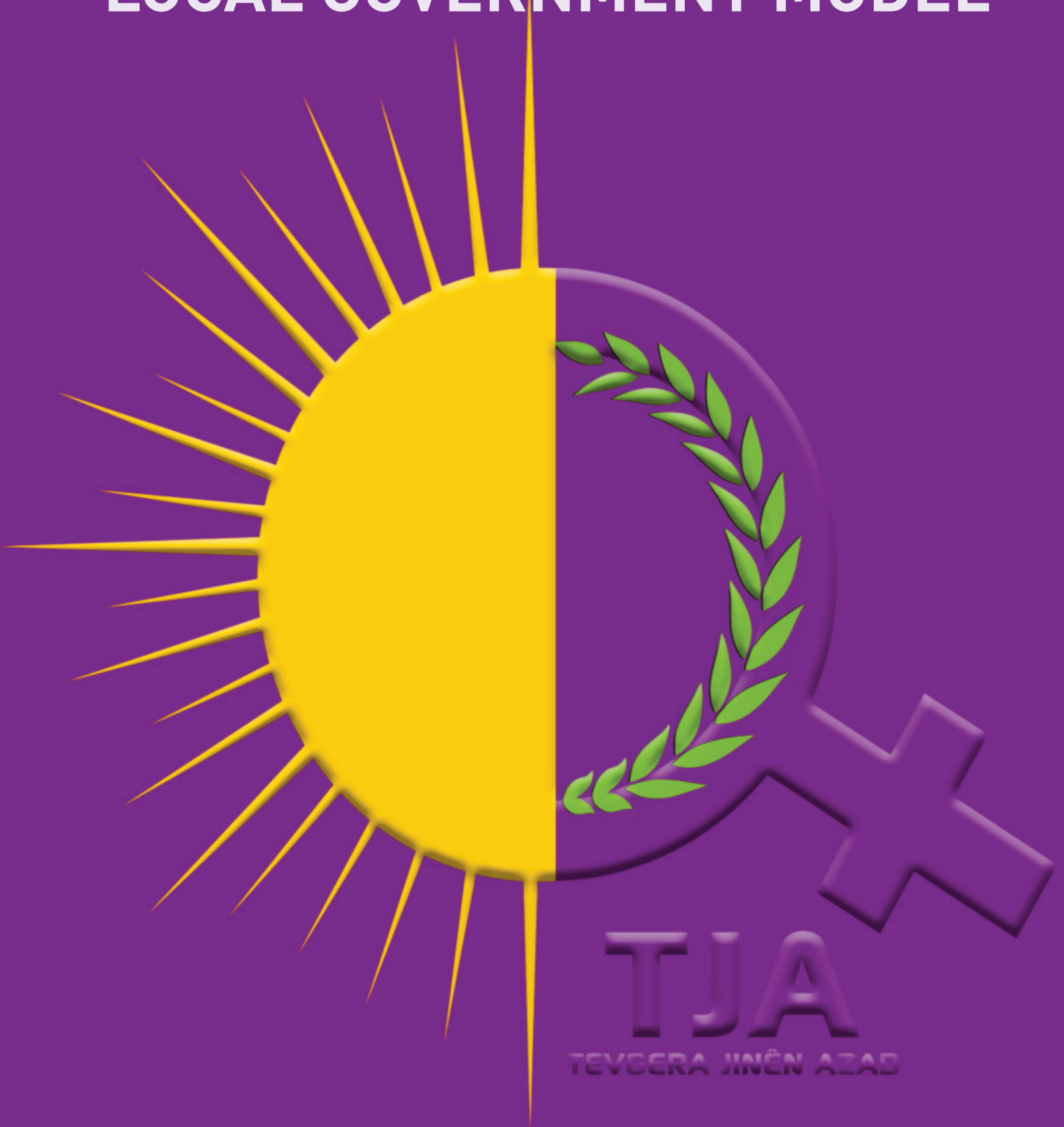


OUR WOMEN LIBERATIONIST LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODEL





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The local government realm is known to be one of those areas that extends into and establishes the broadest contact with all sectors of the society. The representation of women who make up half of the society in local elections is indispensable for the realization of local democracy. Although this area is defined as a men's realm by the system, the Kurdish Women's Movement's over twenty years of experience in local administrations and collaboration with the women's movement in Turkey have resulted in big gains both in terms of women's representation in many areas and the administration of municipalities from a women's perspective.

Municipalities are one of the most basic pillars of local democracy. Our first local government experience dates back to pre-1980. In the local elections held in 1979, Dürre Kaya, Saadet Yavuz and Emine Hacı Yusufoglu became *the first female municipal* councilors in the Hilvan district of Urfa. Our local government experience as a party began in 1999 when we participated in municipal and provincial council elections. We participated in the 1999 local elections as HADEP.



Dürre Kaya



Saadet Yavuz



Emine Hacı Yusufoglu



In 1999, HADEP identified three regions as 'pilot regions' where it would actively encourage positive discrimination in local government elections: Kızıltepe and Derik districts of Mardin and Doğubayazıt district of Ağrı. HADEP participated in the elections with female candidates in these three districts and won the mayorships of all three. Kızıltepe and Derik districts of Mardin and Doğubayazıt district of Ağrı elected **female mayors for the first time** in their history. In this period, the first women's counseling center was opened in Doğubayazıt. Later, the likes of this center were established in different cities under the name of "women's solidarity centers". In the 2004 local elections, the number of our municipalities increased and a total of 57 mayoralties were won, including the provinces of Diyarbakır, Batman, Dersim, Hakkari and Şırnak. Kurdish women started to enter the elections with the candidates they chose. As a result of the arrangements made in favor of women in the list rankings, the number of female candidates exceeded 100. The number of female mayors, which was 3 in 1999, rose to 9 after the 2004 local elections.



Cihan Sincar



Ayşe Karadağ



Mukaddes Kubilay

In 2005, the Democratic Society Party (DTP) became the first political party to adopt the **Co-Chairmanship system**. Aysel Tuğluk was elected as the first co-chairman. The DBP municipalities, which based themselves on the democratic, ecological, women's liberationist paradigm and the philosophy of free and equal partnership in life, had taken a big step with this understanding and implemented the practice of co-chairmanship and equal representation in local governments when entering the 30 March 2014 local elections.

In 2014, DBP entered local government elections with the co-chair and equal representation system. DBP created a new impetus in the field of local governments with the strong participation of women in 2014. DBP and HDP continue to be the world's first and only parties which implement this system in local governments.

In this context; the representation of women in local governments in Turkey entered a different phase with the 1999 elections, by virtue of the enormous efforts of the Kurdish Women's Movement at high costs. The equal representation and co-chairmanship system that the Kurdish Women's Movement has brought to life with great efforts and at high cost is indispensable for us. This is the most important of the mechanisms aimed at securing women's gains as well as their permanency.



As the Kurdish Women's Movement; we believe that women who make up half of the society should be represented equally in all fields of life and we are struggling to achieve this. We consider the co-chairmanship and equal representation System necessary for democratic operation in local governments and declare that we will unyieldingly struggle for this.



Aysel Tuğluk

WOMEN'S GAINS IN 2014 LOCAL ELECTIONS

In the framework of the perspective adopted in the wake of the 2014 local elections, municipal women's councils were established, women's boards and women's coordinations were elected. "Women-men equality commissions" consisting of elected men and women and "women's groups (in municipal councils)" were formed. Women's Policies Departments were established in our three metropolitan municipalities (Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van), and Women's Policies Directorates were established in provincial-district municipalities. In addition, Women's Economy Directorate, Women's Directorates to Combat Violence, Women's Education Directorates and Women's Solidarity Centers were established under these units. In Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, the **"first step station"** and **"domestic violence line"** which were important as the first and only such praxis in local governments in Turkey, were established.

Articles centering on women were added to the collective labor agreements that municipalities concluded with their employees. Texts of collective labor agreements with workers and employees were written with a women's liberationist approach and declared March 8 a public holiday for women workers. Combatting violence against women actively was included in the agreements. The municipalities also included a decision to deprive male employees who engage in violence against women through practices such as bride exchange (berdel), polygamy (kuma) and child-marriage, of their rights in the collective labor agreements.



STATE-APPOINTED-TRUSTEE-PRACTICES AS TOOLS OF EXTORTION

The institutions where the public and women could easily go, talk about their problems and resolve them turned into isolated areas where the public in general and women in particular no longer visited after the appointment of trustees. DBP won 102 municipalities in the 2014 local elections, and trustees were appointed to 96 of them in September 2016. The first action taken by the trustees appointed in 2016 was to target and liquidate women's activities and discharge female employees. Our 43 active women's centers and the shelters affiliated to these centers were the initial targets of trustees; they were rendered nonfunctional and closed, and dozens of co-mayors and council members were arrested.

Many of our co-mayors and elected officials are still in prison. Efforts to combat all kinds of violence against women in the provinces and districts, the awareness and services we developed through women's struggle were 'illegalized' and blocked. They tried to directly break off all relationship between local governments and women's struggle and achievements through decisions to close down women's centers and liberated life-spaces (shelters), to dismiss or assign to different places the employees of the Women's Policies Directorate.



2019 LOCAL ELECTIONS AND THE RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD

31 March 2019 Local Government Elections was the most powerful and remarkable answer to the unlawfulness brought about by the trustee coup in 2016. According to the official results, HDP won 65 Mayorships 1,230 Municipal Council Memberships and 101 Provincial General Assembly Memberships in 3 Metropolitan cities, 5 Provinces, 45 Districts and 12 Towns. Hence was the construction period launched after the damage caused in 2016.

In this context, we'd like to briefly summarize the activities carried out since 2019: In the 65 provincial, district and town municipalities that we won, co-chairmanship system, women's municipal councils, women's boards within the council, women's coordinations, women's commissions and gender equality commissions were established immediately after the 31 March local elections.

- ✓ Local government provincial women's boards were established in all provinces.
- ✓ Women's Policies Departments in our three metropolitan municipalities were activated and became operative. Likewise, women's directorates were established in all our provincial-district municipalities.
- ✓ Legal processes were initiated on behalf of our women's centers that had been closed or transformed by trustees. In addition, many new women's centers were opened and work was carried out to open new ones.
- ✓ Active work was initiated in many provincial and district municipalities towards women's employment, cooperatives, greenhouses, cultivation areas, women's markets, etc. were established.





RE-CONFISCATION BY TRUSTEES ON AUGUST 19, 2019

19 August 2019 has gone down in the history of the Republic of Turkey as a new political coup. As we went on with the rebuilding process, 5 months later the trustee coup was reenacted with the same unlawful practices. Trustees were appointed to our Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van Metropolitan Municipalities. After the 31 March 2019 municipal elections, from the appointment of the first trustee on 19 August to this date a total number of 48 municipalities were taken over by trustees and our co-mayors have been discharged. Since 31 March 2019, our 19 female Co-Mayors have been arrested and put in prison. Our Co-Mayors, who were elected by the people and represent the will of the people, were dismissed from their duties on grounds of superficial pretexts with no legal basis. One of the pretexts the AKP-MHP alliance showed to justify this unlawfulness was the institution of co-chairmanship. The main reason why the co-chairmanship institution is being put on the target is the men-centered regime of masculinity. Women co-mayors and elected women were criminalized on the basis of the co-chairmanship system; the co-chairmanship system was put on trial. The trials are still ongoing and many of our co-mayors have been sentenced in this context. The aim of these attacks is to eliminate the women's system created in local governments through women's struggle and to re-establish the grounds for the predominance of monist masculine mentality. With the latest trustee appointments, the women's directorates and women's solidarity centers in our 48 municipalities were either pacified or closed.





MOBBING AGAINST WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN TRUSTEE-LED MUNICIPALITIES

Department heads appointed by trustees were driven by hostility against Kurds and women and did all in their power to prevent the employment of women. Trustees dismissed all women in executive positions and appointed male executives to replace them. Women working in municipalities were forced to abide by an arbitrary practice whereby they would be sent on exile to work outside their job definitions or in other districts or in other departments. Those who opposed this faced verbal abuse, threats, administrative disciplinary sentences, salary cuts or dismissal. Striking data were revealed in the survey which TÛM BEL-SEN conducted with women working in the municipalities of Diyarbakır, Van, Mardin and Batman about mobbing at work. All four municipalities were taken over by trustees twice, in 2016 and 2019. **90%** of the women who participated in the survey stated that they did not support the appointment of trustees, that work focused on women was interrupted, that the principle of equality was not observed, that they could not express their opinions comfortably, and that they were exposed to mobbing.

According to the results of this survey;

- ✓ They have dismissed all women employees in the municipalities, displaying a sexist approach in terms of division of labor and obstructing women's employment.
- ✓ Women employees were arbitrarily dismissed, and hundreds of women engaged in work related to women were dismissed.
- ✓ Women who were not dismissed were assigned to the idlest positions.
- ✓ Women employed in Women's Centers were assigned only to social assistance work.
- ✓ Lawsuits without any legal basis were brought against women working in women's centers for trivial reasons, and fines were charged.

To summarize some of the interesting data in the study: According to the survey study wherein women working in many different professional positions participated; **96%** of female municipal employees do not support the appointment of trustees to municipalities. While **92%** of the participants said that the principle of equality was not taken into account in the assignment of female personnel to jobs in the municipalities they work, **74%** reported that they were assigned to tasks outside of their unit after the trustee was appointed. The women assigned outside of their unit pointed out the following reasons as the first two reasons for the change of duty; **62.2%** of them said, "The Trustee Management Sent Me to Actually Punish/Intimidate Me". **88%** said "No" to the question, "Is there a working environment where you can comfortably express your ideas in municipalities where trustees are appointed?" **83%** of the participants said "Yes" to the question: "Have you ever been exposed to mobbing in your workplace after trustee appointments?" The research group was also asked the question "Have you ever been exposed to violence at your workplace in the last 5 years?" **95%** of the participants answered "Yes." Among the participants who answered "Yes" to this question, **85.3%** described the violence they encountered as "Psychological Violence", **74.7%** as "Threat of Unemployment/Change of Unit", **63.2%** as "Verbal Violence", **56.8%** as "Exile violence", **30.5%** as "being Forced to Act in Ways they did not want/To Work in Jobs They Did Not Want to through Blackmail/Bluff", **3.2%** as "Sexual Violence/Harassment", and **1.1%** "Physical Violence". **37%** of the participants said "Yes" to the question: "Were You Dismissed After Trustee Appointments? Or If You Were A Contracted Employee, Has Your Contract Been Terminated?"



COMBATTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN KURDISTAN AFTER THE TRUSTEES

The trustees appointed to municipalities by means of statutory decrees, during the state of emergency either closed women's counseling centers affiliated to municipalities or rendered them unfunctional. In Diyarbakır, all 3 shelters affiliated to municipalities were closed and became inoperative. The free living spaces (shelters) affiliated to the Van Metropolitan Municipality were also closed by the trustee. The closure of all need-based centers in the cities of Kurdistan has left women with no counseling centers or shelters that they can go to in cases of violence. The data on murdered women and dubious deaths remains unknown. Relevant NGOs have not been able to monitor them for a certain period, could not report the data, and preventive work was obstructed.

The Rosa Women's Association in Diyarbakır, the Mimoza Women's Association in Mersin and the Star Women's Association in Van established in Diyarbakır in 2018 upon the closure of counseling centers and NGOs working on combating and preventing violence against women.



Ever since it was opened, Rosa has become one of the centers that receives intensive applications from women both through the social media and personally. In face of the inability to satisfy such intensive demand a call was issued to all NGOs and the Diyarbakır Network for Combating Violence was established. The Anti-Violence Network publishes reports at regular intervals. According to these reports, 7950 applications related to violence against women were received in Diyarbakır during the last 5 years. 31 women were murdered during the last four years. There were 21 known dubious female deaths. In 2020, the Star Women's Association was opened in Van. According to the data provided by the association, 50 women who were subject to violence in Van and its districts applied directly to the association in 2022, and the association provided these applicants with legal and psychological counseling support. The social destruction caused by the totality of the policies carried out through the appointment of trustees to local governments constitutes the direct working and struggle area of the associations. Cases of violence against women, massacres of women, suspicious deaths and the number of women driven to suicide have increased upon the closure of women's centers and life-houses/shelters. The closure of mechanisms providing social support has prevented the satisfaction of the economic and social needs of young women, in particular. Young women face violence perpetrated either in direct face to face contact or via digital platforms, in either case putting to work various methods employed in special warfare operations. Violence is perpetrated against young women through various methods used in special warfare policies, either directly or through digital platforms. In cities social anomie is created by paramilitary structures promoting prostitution and substance abuse. Men are encouraged by policies of impunity. Today, associations working to combat violence against women receive applications from all



cities in their region. There are no centers to direct them to. They are directed to police stations and to (the Ministry's) Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİM). As a result of the termination of the Istanbul contract and the ineffective implementation of 6284, the existing official institutions do not provide solutions in the region. According to the reports of these two associations and the network to combat violence which work in the region;

- ✓ Women do not trust law enforcement officials and official institutions; they file their applications with associations.
- ✓ In those cases directed to the police stations, it was observed that the police stations did not have the proper physical conditions that would allow women who had suffered violence to express themselves, that the police officers did not have the formation to talk to traumatized women, that male police officers made statements justifying the perpetrator of violence and tried to convince the complainant women to return home.
- ✓ Women whose lives are danger are directed to shelters affiliated to ŞÖNİMs (violence prevention centers connected to the Ministry). Almost all of the women who went to the shelters were able to stay in the shelter for a maximum of 3 days. The applicant women prefer to stay in the independent shelter of the Mor Çatı Foundation.
- ✓ Most of the women murdered in the cities of Kurdistan were murdered due to the failure to protect them in spite of the court injunctions to that effect. Women prefer returning to homes where their lives are at risk to staying in shelters.

In conclusion ;

The appointment of trustees has been the biggest blow to local democracy in Turkey. The appointment of trustees is an ideological attack on the hard-won and costly achievements of the Kurdish Women's Movement, on its accumulated knowledge and experience throughout the years. The decisions taken by the trustees against women in municipalities have similarities with the policies implemented by the misogynous mentality of the AKP government. The first action taken by the trustees was to target and do away with work on women and female employees. Misogynous policies have the character of an unspoken consensus attesting to the loyalty of trustees to the AKP government.

Presenting the co-chair system as a justification for the extortionist appointment of trustees, in outright ignorance of local willpower is an attack by the patriarchal political power on both the achievements of women and the will of the society. Therefore, it is clear that the appointment of trustees is an intervention in the growing awareness of gender equality in society and the transformation in this sphere. However, the Kurdish Women's Movement continues to demonstrate with all its rhetoric and practices that it insists on co-chairmanship and equal representation and defends this system, despite all the attacks, obstructions and interventions it has endured.

Considering the trustee policies to be only attacks on the gains of the Kurdish Women's Movement and Kurds indicates a failure in awareness of the strategic plans of the government. This extortionist mentality is the problem not only of the Kurdish Women's Movement but the problem of all women who stand up for a liberated life and want peace. Protecting women's gains and achieving new ones will only be possible through women's collective struggle. It will be the collective struggle, resistance and alliance of women that will put an end to the extortionist trustee mindset.



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