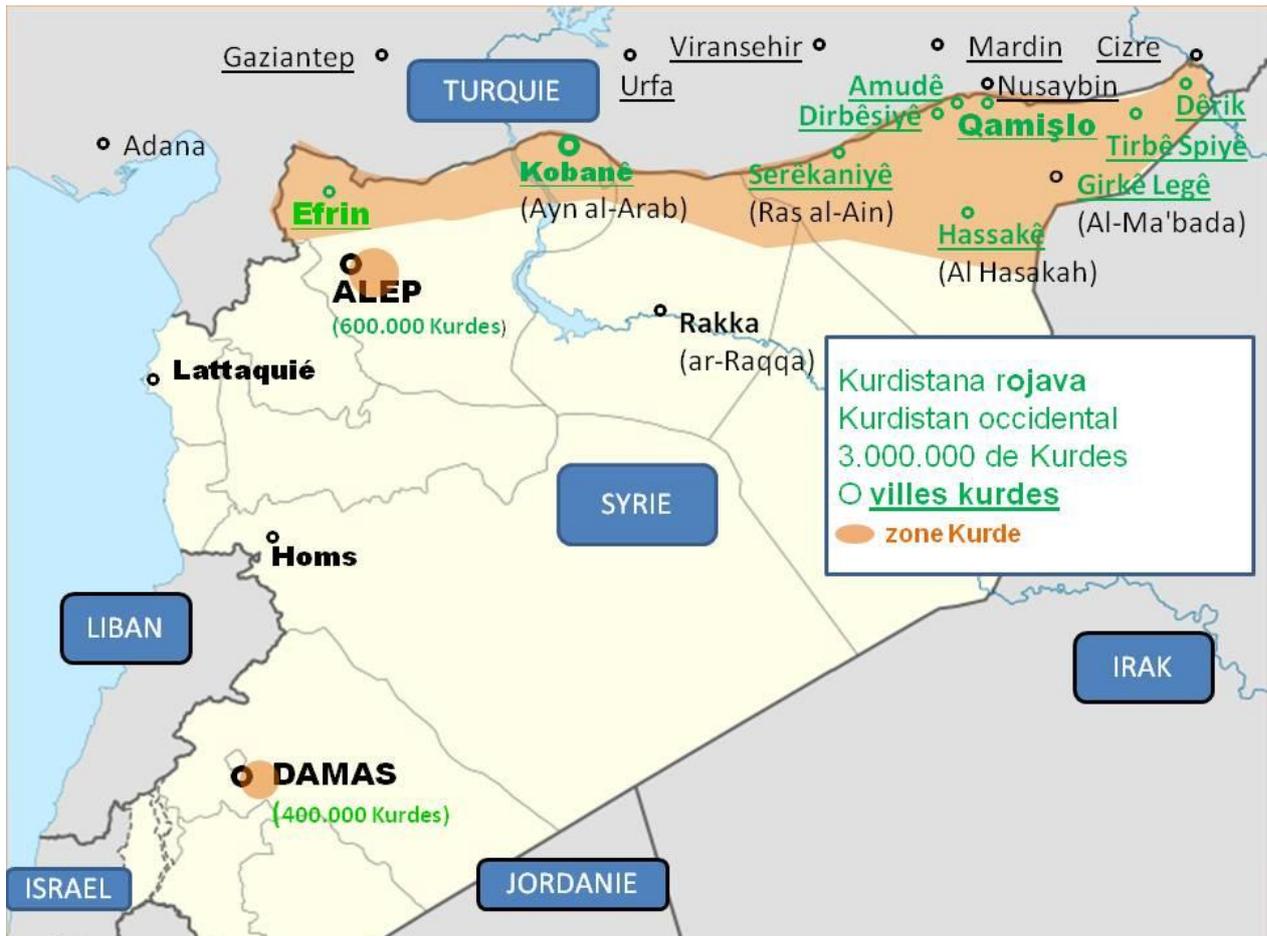


# INFORMATION FILE

## THE KURDS IN SYRIA



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## **THE THREE-STAGE STRATEGY**

Throughout the conflict in Syria, the Kurds have both continued their resistance to the regime and also refrained from getting involved in the dirty war. During this period, they have tried to develop their own independent politics, and on 19 July 2012, the people of Western Kurdistan implemented a 'revolution within a revolution' and took control of the cities they were living in. The Kurdish movement devised and followed a three-stage strategy where they began by capturing villages and the outskirts of cities, then took over civil-service and state-owned institutions and finally aimed to capture all of the cities.

On July 18 in Damascus, Syria, an explosion took place at the building where the Government held most of its effective crisis management meetings, consequently killing the majority of those associated. On the evening of July 19<sup>th</sup> the Free Syrian army seized control of the cities of Minbic and Cerablus located between Kobane and Aleppo. These developments gave rise to an opportunity and obligation for the Kurdish movement to implement the third part of their strategy. There was a popular uprising on July 19 against regime forces where they were overthrown in the cities of Kobane, Efrin, Serekaniye, Dirbesiye, Amude, Derik, Girke Lege, followed by Tirbespiye and Tiltemir. In addition, within 2-3 months regime forces were ousted from the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Aleppo, Rakka and Heseke. In the meantime in Qamislo, the biggest city in the region, even though regime forces haven't been overthrown completely, the people have taken control of the city apart from a few public buildings.

Kurds have also developed their resistance to an advanced stage by integrating other ethnicities and religions, constructing associations and institutions of defence, politics, justice, the cultural, social and economic fields, women's justice and other walks of life. In other words, the movement is slowly building the foundation of the system they regard as 'democratic autonomy.'

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KURDISH SUPREME COUNCIL**

All these developments strengthened the search for unity between different political formations in Western Kurdistan. After several discussions in this direction, more concrete developments occurred in July. The region's largest social and political power, the 'People's Assembly of Western Kurdistan' (MGRK), which PYD is also a part of along with 16 Kurdish parties built the Syrian Kurdish National Assembly (ENKS). They came together in the City of Hewler under the leadership of the local Government (KRG). As a result of this meeting, both assemblies came to a decision 24 July 2012 to act together, and also declared the establishment of the Kurdish Supreme Council. As a result of these developments, masses of people in all the cities of Western Kurdistan came to the streets to assert that the Supreme Council of Kurds was their legitimate voice and that they would support its decisions. In this era of the Supreme Council, work was carried out within three committees which were the "Diplomacy Committee", "Social Services Committee," and "Defence Committee."

## **DIPLOMATIC VICTORY**

Whilst these interior developments echoed in the regional and international arena, the special representative of the Arab League, El Exder Ibrahim and representatives from the United Nations (UN) met with high officials of the Kurdish Council. In addition, council members were also invited to various European countries and were given the opportunity to consult officials and express themselves to the public. The most important development in the field of diplomacy took place in 2013. In May, the Kurdish Council invited Russian representatives and as a result of the negotiations, agreed to a proposal to participate in the second international meeting of Syrian opposition forces in Geneva. For the first time Kurds, whose existence was questioned in the past, were now recognised to join an international platform. As a result, Turkey who continually tried to suppress the resistance and gains of the Kurds in Rojava decided to formally invite the co-chair of the PYD Mr Salih Muslim to Turkey for a meeting. On 10 August 2013 Salih Muslim visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, Tehran, as a formal guest to hold official talks.

## **PUBLIC DEFENCE FORCES –YPG AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Amid these developments in politics and diplomacy, the YPG (People's Defence Forces), created to protect the gains of the Kurds, organized at Brigade and Battalion level in Western Kurdistan and various Syrian cities such as Aleppo and Haseki. The YPG, who play a significant role in the defence of the region, showed great resistance with thousands of its fighters against both the regime and foreign backed armed groups in Aleppo, Afrin, Serekaniye, Amude and Haseki.

The YPG lost dozens of its fighters during this struggle and showed commitment to protect all people of the region without distinction. With this stance all people of the area have embraced the YPG as a national defence force for the entire region.

An important pillar of autonomy is its systems defence, and as such, a law enforcement organisation was built. These legal institutions of law were first put into operation in Kobane and then in turns spread to all Kurdish cities and the Syrian city of Haseki. Academies were established in Cizre, Afrin and Kobane where law enforcement officers were trained and sent out to enforce their responsibilities in the fields of family issues, theft, extortion, kidnapping, murder and so on. They have so far developed solutions for most problems.

In the meantime, Assyrian, Syriac, Arabic, Chechen, Chaldean and Armenian communities cautiously approached this new system to begin with. However after observing the practical approach and seeing the positive results, the public began to take part in the assemblies and in the defence forces. Especially in the People's Assembly for the city of Tiltmir, it is remarkable to see the representation of all ethnic groups. Again, members of the sixth battalion of Tiltmir named "martyr of Meter Ebd El-Henan Meter " consists mainly of Arabs from the tribes of Serabi and Siyad. There are also people from Arab villages and tribes resisting along with Kurds in Girk Lege and fighting against Al Nusra in Cerablus.

## **INSTITUTES OF EDUCATION IN THE MOTHER TONGUE**

Centres of education spread out across the region in order for the public to better understand the system of democratic autonomy and for them to actively participate in the process. Training and education academies were established in many cities and they continue to function in this direction.

In the meantime, the previously established Kurdish Language Association (SZK), began educating its students in Kurdish, their mother tongue, whilst opening nearly 100 schools, training around 1000 teachers and also establishing the Kurdish association for Teachers. Thousands of children, mostly very young, began their educational terms in their native language for the first time in these schools.

Apart from these institutions, many centres of culture and arts opened in several cities such as Qamislo, Derik, Amude, Aleppo, Afrin and Kobane giving courses in Kurdish music, folklore, theatre, and so on.

## **SERVICE AND JUSTICE COMMITTEES**

Social Services together with peace and justice committees were set up to find solutions for social, legal and economic problems. Again, in order to strengthen the foundations of the Legal system, the law and social justice branch together with the Mesopotamia social sciences academy was founded. These committees became increasingly widespread in settlements within the region, finding peaceful solutions to a variety of problems the people went through.

## **LEADING POWER REVOLUTION OF THE REVOLUTION - WOMEN**

Already actively involved in the process since the beginning of the Revolution, Kurdish Women organized under the name "Yekitiya Star". Within a short time they took their places in commanding and decision making levels in public assemblies via women's councils and through women's centres. Women took their places as co-chairs in all levels of management and women's organizations have also played an active role in solving problems related to education, family, politics, economics, law and order. In the field of education, the Kurdish women's teacher's union was founded within SZK in February 2013. In addition, the people of the region are given education on the issues of women's freedom and social/gender. These courses are given in Women's Education and Sciences centres and in Women's academies.

## **WOMEN'S DEFENCE ASSOCIATION: YPJ**

The system of democratic autonomy also intends to revolutionise 'defence' and make sure it is not used as a tool by the state or be stamped with dominant male power. Women made great strides in this field and aim to change it to a community association within the

framework of the autonomy. Women who were fighting for the YPG forces began organising as an armed organisation named the Women's Defence Corps (YPJ.) The YPJ has organised itself in all cities at the level of battalion and brigades.

## **REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH MOVEMENT**

Youth work is carried out autonomously and uniquely in all cities under the name 'Revolutionary Youth Movement', otherwise known as 'Tevgera Ciwanen Soresger.' In addition, university students have been organising themselves under the 'Patriotic Federation of Students – Federasyona Xwendekaren Welatparez' and academies and institutions with educational, cultural and artistic functions are now spreading across the autonomous region.

## **CO-OPERATIVES TO BREAK THE ECONOMIC EMBARGO**

The region is now facing various economic and health issues due to the embargoes it faces. The issues that are most intense are in the pharmaceutical area, food and fuel, basic life necessities, and it is still deteriorating. A committee formed under the Supreme Kurdish Council is now making sure scarce resources and rations are delivered fairly to the people. The Kurdish Red Crescent Authority (Heyva sor a Kurd) is providing emergency health resources and food to the people of the region.

In addition, to manage the local economy the Western Kurdistan Development Authority was created, beginning in Kobane and Derik, which has begun to develop co-operatives.

## **INTERIM MANAGEMENT AND ELECTIONS**

Kurds have gained great experiences as a result of years of struggle and have decided to reflect this in the context of the latest developments and their needs; they have taken a greater stride and have launched a move for a temporary governance/management and social contract that will represent all structures in the region. Accordingly, a committee with fair representation from all ethnic, cultural and religious roots will announce a temporary administration. In addition, the Kurdish High Council will declare the administration for the draft Social Contract. It is expected that preparations will take 3 months, elections will be held within the following 3 months and the social contract will receive its verdict from the public. As a result of the election, the regions official Governance will be founded.

The process in Syria began with demands of democracy, freedom and quality by the Syrian people and has now entered its third year. Intervention of foreign forces via armed fundamentalist gangs has turned the resistance to one of death, destruction and torment together with raging sectarian violence. The Kurds have become the center of developments with their 'revolution within a revolution' and the construction of a democratic autonomous region. They have given Syria and the region's other ethnic and religious minorities a glimpse of hope and become a guiding force for them.

## **THE ASSAULTS AGAINST KURDS AND TURKEYS ROLE**

As they did whilst co-operating with the Baath regime, Turkey and international forces are again targeting Kurdish gains but this time through Al- Qaeda affiliated groups. As Turkey's requests for a buffer zone in Western Kurdistan were not fulfilled, they have supported these gangs in a fruitless bid to break the will of the Kurdish people. In this context, Aleppo's Kurdish neighbourhoods were exposed to attacks on 25 and 26 October 2012 in which Kurds were killed. Attacks by the Turkey-backed vigilante groups continued without interruption from 27-30 October in Afrin.

From May 25, 2013, the villages connected to Afrin came under attack again, and all types of aid were denied from the city's people even though its population had risen two-fold due to migration from Aleppo. In addition, an attempt was made to cut the electricity and drinking water networks in the region. Three Al-Qaeda affiliates were caught by law enforcement officers and they found during questioning that these vigilantes had come to Syria from Tunisia through Turkey. They also noted that the vigilantes had told them a group of Turkish Army officers assisted them throughout.

## **VIGILANTES ATTACK SEREKANIYE AND GIRZIRO**

The ceasefire in Serekaniye was broken once again on 16 January 2013. Whilst YPG fighters were attempting to drive regime forces out of the Girziro village connected to Girke Lege, armed gangs began attacking again in Serekaniye. The armed gang came with a lot more man power and artillery this time, with 20 different groups involved, and the fighting went on for 15 days.

Iraq-Damascus Islamic state and Al-Qaeda affiliated Al-Nusra groups settled in the Til Xelef Town 2km outside the area where the conflict was taking place. These mobs attacked the town of Serekaniye 4 times and took over a number of neighborhoods, but were later driven out after violent clashes. It was evident after these mobs left that they had 'trashed' it with bullets, bombs and mortars everywhere. It's fair to note that not only Kurds but the homes of Arabs, Yezidis and others were also targeted. Serekaniye looked to be in a similar state to Beirut under siege. A big part of Serekaniye was emptied of everything after the clashes, however after the YPG took control of the border post which opens up to Ceylanpinar, people have begun to slowly return.

## **AL NUSRA CUT ELECTRICITY LINES**

Power which had been provided to Serekaniye in return for water was completely disconnected by Al Nusra. Electricity provided to Mebruka 40km away from Serekaniye is also in the control of Al Nusra. Al Nusra still provided electricity to Haseke where regime forces were situated, but eventually decided to completely cut off all these lines also. As a result, access to electricity remains a major problem in the whole of Rojava.

## **DIGGING WELLS FOR WATER**

Associated with the problem of access to electricity is the issue of water. Without electricity the water distribution network in the centre of the district cannot operate or function. This is why the public is trying to eliminate this dependence by digging for water. The Service committee is attempting to run water through the main engines and generators; even though it is plagued by setbacks, it has become an alternative for the people.

## **HEALTHCARE AND ACCESS TO FOOD**

Besides electricity and water the largest necessity is in healthcare, where there is a shortage of medicine and doctors. Eight months ago the town hospital was destroyed by gang members and all hospital equipment was plundered. Furthermore, without electricity the hospital is unable to function. Patients have been transferred to various makeshift hospitals. More emergency patients are sent two hours away to Qamislo. However ambulances also belonging to the Kurdish Red Crescent frequently come under attack. On the 16 August 2013 an ambulance carrying patients near the Esendiye village was attacked by gang members and the driver Sileman Cemil and Nurse Xebat Ferme were killed. A person was also injured during this particular attack.

Including in Serekaniye, Turkey closed all border gates after they fell into the control of the Kurdish movement, even though the transition of Al Nusra members was allowed to continue freely. The Kurdish Regional Government also closed its borders, which prevented the crossing of aid at the Semalka border. In the midst of all this, the attacks by regime forces and Al-Qaeda affiliated groups continued. This left the Rojava Kurds trapped and deprived.

It is said that the mobs have destroyed wheat warehouses and plundered thousands of tons of wheat which they sell in Aleppo. An example is the bread factory in the Zerdest neighborhood; all its machines were taken so it has been forced to cease operating.

## **ARABS UNDER ATTACK FLEE TO KURDISH TERRITORIES**

Arabs in the region have also become targets during the fighting and have faced threats to their lives and looting by groups who initially claimed they will free them from Assad. Many of the Arabs who were tormented have moved to Kurdish regions, settled here and begun protecting their neighborhoods with Kurdish village and neighborhood committees. The villages of Babilxer, Elok, Bierir , Dahrur el Arab, Errade, Qamislo, Ebu Duwel, Dibana, Hamo, Kiser in Serkaniye, and the Ebbas,Kentar, Ekbes, Teltisnin and Kinetra villages of Dirbesiye consist fully of Arabs in the Rojava region.

## **WHO ARE THE FORCES ATTACKING ROJAVA?**

In fact, it all started after the rebellion in Daraa, Syria and the 19 July Rojava revolution which followed. As is clear, regional and international powers such as the United States, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, aimed to create some groups who would serve their best interests in the construction of a new Syria. The Kurdish campaign which runs independent from the regime and the opposition was not embraced by these powers therefore they began assisting these groups in every form. For example, even though the 'Al Nusra' group was added to the list of terror organizations, it is

ironic that attacks on Kurds increased straight after the opposition was given more gun power by the same America which proscribed the group. The Free Syrian Army chairman of the Military Council Abdulcebbar Al Agidi confessed that these aids in the forms of more arms were given to them in order to attack Kurds.

## **WHO IS AL NUSRA?**

Attacks on the Kurdish region are mostly implemented in the names of Al Nusra, Gureba Al Sam, Ehfad-I Resul, Ehrar Guveran and various other smaller groups. Al Nusra was never a power in the region and its objectives have never been for a national revolution. Gureba El Sam was a group created by the Syrian Baath Party and sent to Iraq to fight alongside Al-Qaeda against America. Apart from never having any conflict with the regime, Al Nusra was even given the city of Rakka by the regime to defend themselves.

This Al-Qaeda affiliated group, together with 15 Salafists groups, plans to set up an Islamic Emirate in the region. They have already constructed administrations under the name of Iraq-Damascus Islamic state. They intend to conquer the Kurdish territories and add them to their emirate. Looking at the identities and nationalities of the Jihadist groups attacking Kurds, almost all members have been imported from various different countries. Jihadists have been pouring in from prisons around the world where they were either released openly to fight against the regime or escaped. Over 800 prisoners from Abu Ghraib in Iraq, up to 1200 prisoners from the Libyan Benghazi Kuyeyfiye prison, around 250 prisoners from the Pakistan Dera Han prison and 1400 heavily penalized inmates from Saudi Arabia are rumored to be fighting within these groups.

So-called clergy men working in co-ordination with these Jihadist groups have been giving out fatwas (order of God) with content such as 'It is righteous to murder Kurds.' Following these fatwas many hundreds of defenceless Kurdish civilians, mostly women, elderly and children have been murdered. Only recently, on the 1 August, videos were released on social media and news networks with images of more than 70 Kurds being massacred. The Jihadists still have hundreds of civilians as hostages and also assassinated a Kurdish high member of Council called Isa Huso in a bombardment. During a meeting held in Turkey, the Free Syrian army commander of the Military council of Aleppo and chairman of the FSA, colonel Joseph Al Akidi, stated that they will 'destroy Kurds'. This goes to show what sort of a big risk the presence of these imbeciles generates for the Kurds.

## **THE AIM OF THE ATTACKS**

The attacks that began in November 2012 and gained momentum on the 16 July were intended to encompass Cizre. Accordingly, Serekaniye would fall, and the whole of the Cizre area will be encircled via the Heseke path through the southern line all the way to Rimelan and Derrik. Serekaniye was important because it is the last stop of the Cizre area going towards Kobane. There is only Til Ebyad in between.

However this plan fell thanks to the resistance of the people led by YPG and YPJ. The control of the whole of Serekaniye has fallen to the Kurdish forces. This meant that Al-Nusra only has control of Til-Ebyad between Cizre and Kobane. There are Arab villages placed between Serekaniye and Til Ebyad which were built as part of a strategy by the Arab Baath

party to divide them under the ‘Arab belt.’ Again within another 60-70 km there are only Kurdish Villages. The eastern side of this region is Til Ebyad and the west is the banks of the Firat River (Euphrates.) Water and electricity is generated from this region. The aim of Al Nusra and other Free Syrian Army affiliates is to gain full control of Til Ebyad and to cut all links between Cizre and Kobane. This also means Afrin on the West of Kobane will be isolated.

For these reasons, attacks began in mid-July to the Til Ebyad and Til Ebyad regions. Doubtlessly, Til Kocer was being attacked in order to gain control of the oil-producing region of Rimelan. And Til Ebyad to encircle Kobane. The objective was to attack more than one area to confuse Kurds and take their attention away from one or the other. This never worked and therefore direct attacks begun against Kobane.

### **THE MEETING IN TURKEY AND THE FSA–NUSRA ALLIANCE**

After the meeting that took place in Istanbul, another was also held in Antep on July 26. This meeting played a significant role in planning for the massacre in Rojava. This is because a series of interviews took place in Istanbul on the same day between co-leader of PYD Salih Muslim and Turkish officials, the Turkish Government wanted to create an impression that they changed politics and viewpoints towards Rojava.

Another significant point within this period is that after this meeting, the Free Syrian Army’s affiliated groups decided to attack Kurds along with Al Qaeda. This included in particular extension groups of the Muslim Brotherhood such as Liwa-i-Tehid, who began attacking Kurds in full co-ordination with the Al-Qaeda affiliated groups. Turkey not only provided support, education, and unification to these gangs but also used official state personnel to assist them. After the meeting in Antep, it is noted that 117 Kurdish villages were attacked; the commander of Al Akrad stated that during fighting around Aleppo on 14-15 August 2013 two Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT) members were killed and that they would release the identity in the next few days.

As shown here, Turkey seems to be building relations and talking with Kurds, and on the other hand is setting out plans to defeat the Rojava revolution. They are implementing a cheap politics to say “Whoever wins Turkey also wins”.

The most profound and dangerous consequences of these attacks would be to set off a Kurdish-Arab war, and it appears they are trying to push Syria and Rojava to the state Iraq is in now. They are trying to give a fatal blow to the Kurdish movement’s defined lines of equality between all ethnic, sectarian and belief structures.

### **CALL FOR EMERGENCY MEASURES BY THE KURDISTAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (KNC)**

A statement was released on 9 August 2013 by the Kurdistan National Congress (KNC) executive council to international and public forces reflecting on the urgency of the situation and the magnitude of the danger. They stated that the war which has lasted for over two years now is gradually turning into an internal ethnic and sectarian war, and Kurds who have stayed neutral have become a target for the regime and foreign-backed oppositional groups.

In a statement, it was put forward that apart from Kurds who have fled the violence in Aleppo and Damascus, the population of the area under attack has doubled in the last period together with fleeing Arabs and Christians. In addition, the systematic embargoes add intensity to the tragic conditions people are living at the moment. The KNK executive council condemned the silence of Western powers who at first stated they were fighting against Al-Qaeda affiliated groups, and those who said they were on the side of peace, democracy and freedom even when their actions proved the opposite. The KNK made an urgent statement to the United Nations, European Union, and the European Council to act immediately for stabilisation.

- 1- The attacks against Kurds and Kurdish territories should be condemned and those responsible should be tried at an international court.
- 2- Turkish Government must cease supporting these groups, and must open border gates. Border crossings should be opened in South Kurdistan and Iraq.
- 3- Humanitarian aid must be provided to Kurdish territories under the UN's supervision.
- 4- On the basis of the construction of a new democratic and pluralistic Syria, the existence, rights and autonomous region must be recognised.