



Brussels, 2 February 2026

TO ALL MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

Urgent Action Appeal - Protect Teachers, Students, Unionists, and Education in Northeast Syria

Dear colleagues,

Education International (EI) urgently calls on all member organisations to take action in response to the rapidly deteriorating situation in Northeast Syria and the severe threats facing teachers, students, unionists, and the entire education system established in Rojava, Syria.

Rojava refers to the Kurdish-majority regions of northern and northeastern Syria bordering Turkey and Iraq, organized since 2012 into the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). Rojava is home to Kurds, Arabs, Syriac/Assyrian Christians, Armenians, Turkmen, Yazidis, and others. This autonomous region emerged during the Syrian civil war when local defence forces stepped in after the Syrian state withdrew, enabling the development of a political project based on democratic confederalism featuring decentralized governance, gender equality via co-leadership structures and women's defence units, and protections for multilingual, multiethnic education opportunities.

Over the past decade, Rojava and its defence force became crucial partners in defeating ISIS, but the region has remained caught between the Syrian civil war, Turkish military incursions, political embargoes, and ongoing instability. The situation intensified in January 2026 when the Syrian interim government started a military attack against the self-administration in North and East Syria and hundreds of ISIS detainees escaped. Rojava's unique experiment in grassroots democracy and pluralistic coexistence is now under severe threat from renewed Islamist activism.

The EI affiliate, the Union of Teachers of North and East Syria (UTNES), represents more than 40,000 educators and has been instrumental in supporting a pluralistic, democratic, and inclusive education system.

Escalating violence, forced displacement, and the dismantling of local institutions place at risk:

- Mother tongue education in Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac, Armenian,
- Democratic pedagogy and community-based governance,
- Gender equitable educational leadership, including extensive participation of women educators,
- Union autonomy and academic freedom,
- Public provision of education open to all communities.

Educators in the region have rebuilt and maintained public education amid war and economic deprivation. Their achievements are a rare example of inclusive, secular, feminist informed, public education flourishing under extraordinary conditions. Today, there is a real danger that this entire system will be dismantled and replaced with authoritarian and religiously imposed education structures,

erasing decades of union led progress and violating fundamental human and educational rights.

EI calls on all member organisations to:

1. Alert national governments, foreign ministries, and United Nations agencies about the urgent need to safeguard democratic and minority rights in Syria and protect teachers, students, and educational institutions;
2. Condemn any forced restructuring of education systems that restricts mother tongue instruction, violates union rights, or imposes ideological or religious control over education; and
3. Support monitoring and international advocacy ensuring that education remains a cornerstone of any future political or post conflict settlement in Syria.

Additionally, we call on all member organisations to provide financial contributions to support UTNES in maintaining its union activism, safeguarding its structures, and continuing to deliver essential services to its members.

As displacement increases and union infrastructure comes under attack, flexible financial resources are urgently needed to ensure that UTNES can continue defending educators' rights, coordinating humanitarian support to teachers, and preserving the foundations of democratic, inclusive public education in the region.

Education is fundamental for democracy, gender equality, and peace. The destruction of this education system would be an irreversible loss, not only for the people of North and East Syria, but for all who believe in education as a public good.

EI strongly encourages member organisations to use the [attached customisable letter](#) to contact relevant authorities without delay. Please share your protest letters with EI (headoffice@ei-ie.org). Messages of solidarity and financial support for UTNES leaders and members are also encouraged.

In solidarity,



David Edwards
General Secretary