



# BOZOGLAN: PRACTICES IN JARABULUS PRESENT A SUCCESSFUL GOVERNMENT MODEL FOR SYRIA'S FUTURE

Emin Bozoglan



Dr. Emin Bozoglan, who was born in Gebere/Bayir-Bujak in 1956, graduated from Hacettepe University Faculty of Medicine in 1986; graduated as a specialist from Hacettepe University Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics in 1990. Starting to work in Elazığ Training and Research Hospital in 1990, Dr. Emin Bozoglan has worked as a specialist for 24 years. In 2012, he worked voluntarily as a gynecologist in the tent camps where Bayir-Bujak Turks were staying. Working in Ankara Public Hospitals Institution since 2014, Bozoglan took office in Syrian Turkmen Assembly as Secretary General in between 2014 and 2016. In the election held on June 4, 2016, he was elected president of Syrian Turkmen Assembly.

**After the general assembly which took place a short-time ago you have been elected as the president of the Syrian Turkmen Assembly, where you were holding the secretary general position before. What activities is the assembly conducting, and what are your plans and priorities in your presidency for Syria and international field?**

We, as the Syrian Turkmen Assembly, have projects for future of Syrian Turkmens in particular, and to provide a democratic, just and peaceful government to New Syria. Within this framework, we are working on both political and service fields.

Syrian Turkmens' political organization which began in 2011 has entered into the process of institutionalization in 2012 with the establishment of Syrian Turkmen Platform. All the Turkmen political organizations have gathered under a single roof with Syrian Turkmen Platform's declaration of establishment of Syrian Turkmen Assembly in 2013. I was elected president of Syrian Turkmen Assembly in the election held on July 4, 2016, after Syrian Turkmen 3<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly Meeting held on May 26-27, 2016.

During my tenure as secretary general in previous term, I had the opportunity

to do some feasibility studies regarding both Syrian Turkmen Assembly in particular and Syria overall. We have planned what we need to do in this framework. Our main responsibility is being active in political arena. However, the fact that our people are facing some problems as they have had to migrate due to war has required us to be active in public service as well. Our priority is to address problems and demands of our people living in both Syria and Turkey, and to try to solve these problems. We are working hard, in cooperation with Turkey or international aid agencies if necessary, to meet the demands.

Syrian Turkmens have a demographic structure spreading throughout Syria. Some of our people have come to Turkey during the war. Syrian Turkmens were not in communication with each other due to the demographic spread. When our people came to Turkey, some of them began to live in the camps together, and some of them began to live with their own means. Gathering Syrian Turkmens under a single roof, having representatives from each district and providing unity and solidarity of Turkmens, Syrian Turkmen Assembly has taken on a significant historical task. Our goal after this point is to know each other,

grow together by doing decent works, and raise new generations who will build our future. Our most important mission is to create an infrastructure which helps Syrian Turkmens to take active roles in government, politics, economy and trade of Syria.

We are doing our works in this way. Since the day we took the office me and my team have been pursuing a roadmap by setting politics-service balance. In the month of Ramadan, when was just after we took the office, we visited our community for iftar. We listened to their problems. Then, in Ramadan Feast we visited 6 camps in Turkey where Turkmens are in large numbers. We listened to their problems one to one, and we had conversation with them. We talked about our plans and projects. This approach in politics of Syrian Turkmen Assembly ushers in a new phase. When we look at the institutions within Syrian opposition, this is a service which has been done for the first time. We are receiving positive feedbacks.

President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, made a statement regarding giving citizenship to Syrian refugees when we went to our grassroots. Since we were already in the field we discussed the issue by arranging field meetings. Besides citizenship issue,

improving conditions of the camps and problems that our students are facing have been addressed. We have reported all these issues and submitted to relevant authorities. I want to add that we have made significant progress regarding these issues. With this approach the fact that we have provided coordination between field and the assembly, and we have made information flow reliable and continuous have began to bring positive results. Another important question voiced by grassroots in our field meetings, which is a very significant and vital question for us, has been the question of “when will we go back to Syria; what will be our positions when we get back?”. The most fundamental principle of the Syrian Turkmen Assembly is to maintain Turkmen presence in Syria, and to guarantee our social, political and cultural rights. In this context, the fact that the issue of “going back to homeland/our town/our land”, which is our mission, has been corresponded by the grassroots demonstrates us once again that we are on the right track. We believe that you don't own the place where you do not present. For this reason, we want to go back to our land where we were exiled from. We want to get back and protect our identities, and live in peace with all other elements in Syria. For us Turkish ci-

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tizenship is beyond just an identity card, it is a medal of honor. Although we, Syrian Turkmen, keep this medal of honor, our wish is to go back to our homeland.

While we as Syrian Turkmen Assembly have been speeding up our works, unfortunately a malicious coup attempt took place in Turkey on July 15, 2016. Because of this attempt, which can be accepted as a milestone not only for Turkey but also for us, Turkey has begun to form a new equation at both domestic and international level. Turkey's agenda and priorities have changed for good reason, and the issue of citizenship have not take place in agenda for a long time. However, we have made necessary meetings with the authorities in this process. We are maintaining our

works in coordination with all the responsible authorities such as AFAD, Migration Management Office, Population Registry Administration.

Since the time we took the office, we have also taken important steps politically. Taking a very strategic step to eliminate terrorism in Syria equation, Turkey started Operation Euphrates Shield. It has conducted negotiations with international community, and created a new peace formula by acting together with Iran, Russia and other supporting countries besides coalition powers against ISIS. We believe that Turkey's initiative and will power will bring about good results within the process. By the way, I would like to point that we are trying to do our part in this

new equation set by Turkey, and we will continue to do.

**It can be seen that Syrian Turkmen are spread throughout Syria. Could you tell us the current situation of Syrian Turkmen region by region?**

Syrian Turkmen with Syrian people began to fight against oppressive Assad regime. We have a just claim to live in a democratic Syria freely and dignifiedly. Because Turkmen are spread throughout Syria from Aleppo to Bayır-Bujak, from Homs, Hama, Raqqa to Tartus, Damascus and the Golan Heights, their situation in the course of the war has been at different levels depending on the geographical structure. Today, some Syrian Turkmen can speak Turkish fluently, while others, who live in interior regions and have been under political and cultural oppression by Baas regime for years, have had to forget Turkish. Moreover, some Turkmen have lost their identities. Syrian Turkmen have been mistreated politically, socially, culturally and economically. During the war their suffering has drastically increased.

When we look at the situation in the field, it can be said that we have done our best to resist to not leave our lands. Despite of the heavy bombing

Turkmen in Aleppo, which has the biggest Turkmen population, have not left Aleppo.

Hama-Homs Turkmen unfortunately have been the most suffering group in the beginning of the war, and they have faced ethnic cleansing by the regime especially in regions of Zara and Bab-ı Amro. Turkmen, who migrated from this region –in fact it can be said that they have been exiled rather than migrated-, mostly have gone to Turkey and Lebanon. Turkmen of Damascus and Golan have been struggling for life under the regime's oppression since the beginning of war. Another region which is one of the regions that have been affected most from cruelty in Syria is Bayır-Bujak. Russia's stepping in especially in a time when Syrian regime was struggling and was unable to cope with Free Syrian Army has led to change in balances. Under the guise of fighting against ISIS, Russia has carried out systematic attacks against the Free Syrian Army. It carried out biggest attacks to Turkmen Mountain in Bayır-Bujak region. We also witnessed that these attacks increased after Turkey's downing of Russian warplane. Intense attacks happening during that time has led to losing control of big part of Bayır-Bujak. Turkmen villages in the regi-

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on have been mostly vacated, however, abandoned villages, farms, orchards are still under attack. While conflicts are still partly ongoing, there are no civilians in the region. Almost all of Turkmens from Bayir-Bujak are now living in Turkey. Some of them live in the camps in Turkey, while others live with their own means. On the other hand, we have still troops in the region. Currently, we have five or six villages. Our troops are fighting for protecting their homeland.

Another Turkmen region that has faced torment is Raqqa. Our villages in the region, which was taken by ISIS first, especially Hammam Turkmens in Tel Abyad were subject of migration after PYD/YPG has taken the control of the region on May 2015. Furthermore, PYD/

YPG's practices, which violate human rights, such as recruiting by force, demolishing houses and extra judicial executions, have been reported by independent international institutions such as the UN, Amnesty International and Observatory for Human Rights. We have also identified that there are practices to change demography in the regions which are under control of PYD recently, and we presented our reports regarding the issue to the authorities.

Turkmen regions in North of Aleppo, especially on Azaz-Jarabulus line, were taken over by ISIS in 2014. With the Operation Euphrates Shield launched by Free Syrian Army with the support of Turkey our villages in the region have begun to be liberated. This region is den-



sely populated by Turkmen. The region called Azaz-Jarabulus line is a Turkmen region with a population of 350,000-400,000 and 142 Turkmen villages. The Security Zone strategy, which has been discussed by Turkey and Syrian Turkmen Assembly for a long time with the cleansing the region of terrorists, but which couldn't find support from the international community and the West, has begun to come into action. With the establishment of security zone Turkmen, who were refugees in Turkey, have begun to return their homes.

Neighborhoods and districts of Aleppo face to most terrifying blockade and bombardment in the world history. In the center of Aleppo, a huge massacre is going on. Everything – civilians, hospitals, aid convoys- is targeted. Most of a half million people in center of Aleppo is Turkmen. Most targeted neighborhoods are Holluk, Hayderiye, Seyh Hizir and Bostan Pasa.

**A considerable part of Syrian Turkmen have faced forced migration, and most of them have migrated to Turkey. You mentioned that you visited the camps and listened to their problems. What are the problems of Syrian Turkmen refugees,**

**what are their demands and what do you do to meet these demands?**

Actually, these can be considered as demands rather than problems. It should be pointed out that Syrian Turkmen were forcefully taken away from Anatolia where they are politically and culturally attached during and after the World War I, and they had to live in the other side of the border. Again a war, a bloody war, have make Syrian Turkmen come together with their brothers and sisters living in Turkey, their identities, and cultures under very harsh conditions. Syrian Turkmen have big expectations with a centenary longing towards Turkey. However, challenging conditions of war, as well as Turkey's busy agenda, make it difficult to meet the demands. In this point, we are trying to provide coordination and communication between Turkey and Turkmen. Our demands are being met by time, by keeping open communication channels and with patience. The key word here is patience and dialog. We are moving together slowly but surely, and I believe that we will end up with better results.

I also want to add that we, Turkmen, had a great and steadfast love for Turkey even before we came to Turkey. Every Syrian Turkmen wished

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to come to Turkey at least once in a lifetime. However, as I mentioned before, Syrians Turkmens had to come to Turkey under war conditions. We have not come to Turkey for visit, we have had to migrate here due to heavy bombardments. I wish we had not come together in this way, but this is the fact and we have to act according to the conditions.

Majority of Turkmens who came to Turkey are living in the camps, and a considerable part of the camps where we have been living for 5 years are tent camps. While we, Turkmens, had never thought about living in tents, we have found ourselves living in these tents. Although our economic condition is not very good, we, Turkmens, have always been charitable.

Therefore, this new life conditions, so to speak, have offended our feelings. We have had difficulties to adapt to these conditions. Moreover, there were some problems in meeting the basic needs due to mass migrations. Those have been resolved over time, however, there are still problems in adaptation and socio-psychological issues regarding high expectations.

For example, when we, Syrian Turkmens, first came to Turkey we had the idea that we were going to holy lands and we had expectations of that our needs were to meet immediately. However, naturally Republic of Turkey has its own laws, rules and principles. Moreover, Turkey does not only host Turkmens, it hosts over 3.5 million Syrians, and it has

legal responsibilities and bureaucratic regulations towards this new population. Based on this it may not be possible for Turkey to create luxury conditions for us. Majority of the problems here result sometimes from bureaucratic practices and sometimes from arbitrary treatments. The biggest problem we have faced up until today has been physical conditions in the tent camps. I have already mentioned psychological dimension of the issue, however, there are also problems in practice. The fact that Turkmen families have to live together in a single, crowded tent with no privacy have damaged beliefs. However, when we described this issue to authorities, to AFAD in particular, they said that we had a justified request, and over time improvements have taken place. We as Syrian Turkmen Assembly have begun to get in return as we have had good dialogues with authorities. AFAD has begun to transform tent camps into container camps. Of course, we do not want Turkmen to live in either tent camps or container camps. We wish to live in permanent residences, to work and produce until we return our homelands. We wish we will carry out the projects that will meet our demands together over time.

Another issue that was emphasized in our meetings

in the field has been the issue of education. Unfortunately, some of our Turkmen youth could not attend universities. Moreover, many of them hardly complete middle school and high school education. We have found some reasons for that. First of all, some of our youth are fighting for protecting their homeland, therefore, they can't continue their education. Even if they want to continue they face some technical and practical problems. Some of our youth cannot attend to universities due to financial problems or lack of qualified education in previous terms. Another problem is that our youth who attend to universities face financial problems because they cannot find scholarship. As Syrian Turkmen Assembly, we make a huge effort to overcome these problems in order to provide our youth, who we consider as architects of our future, to grow up in better conditions. We have put our plans and projects into effect, however, this is not easy to solve these problems immediately. I believe that we will overcome these problems together with patience and ambition.

**With the Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkey is trying to create a security zone on Azaz-Jerabulus line, and we know that Aleppo**

*Turkmen are totally against all of this extremism going on in Syria. There is no extremism or radicalism in our traditions and customs. We have never had our eyes on others territory. We continue to fight for a democratic order in which we can live peacefully together with Syrian people.*

**Turkmens densely populate in this area. For this reason, the Operation Euphrates Shield is a development which will affect Aleppo Turkmens directly. You, as the assembly, what do you think about the Operation Euphrates Shield, and how does the operation affect Aleppo Turkmens?**

We express in every occasion that the Operation Euphrates Shield is a valid and legitimate operation. I can even say that it is a belated step. Creating a security zone on Azaz-Jerabulus line is very significant for Turkmens' existence and survival in Syria.

Cleansing the Turkmen regions of all the terrorist elements, ISIS in particular, is essential for Turkmens to return their homelands. This

is also significant for Turkey's security, as well. We think that the security zone that will be created on Azaz-Jarabulus line should also be implemented in Bayir-Bujak region. This second step has a strategic importance for both Turkmens to return their homes and Turkey's security. We also think that it is crucial that Hammam Turkmen region in Raqqa-Tel Abyad region, where there is oppression by PYD/YPG, should also be made security zone.

We know that PYD/YPG is not truthful regarding being contented with east of Euphrates. The aim of these organizations which are branches of PKK that poses an open threat to Turkey is to reach Mediterranean by creating a terror corridor passing through west of Euphrates if they find enough support. If this



sneaky plan is realized all the Turkmens living in Bayir-Bujak, Aleppo, Raqqa line lying on southern border of Turkey will face issue of survival. We do not accept this plan. Realizing this plan will threaten existence of Turkmens, as well as it threatens national security of Turkey.

**Are you saying that military operations of Turkey and the Free Army should include these regions as well?**

Turkey is a great country which has a long history and strong state structure. The will that Turkey presents with the Operation of Euphrates Shield shows how Turkey is determined to overcome these threats. As we always mention, our another common ground with Turkey –beside that we come from same origin, we are relatives, and we speak same language-is that Turkey's security and survival of Syrian Turkmens are attached. We are sharing a common fate again. In this point we, as Turkmens, are doing our best to do our part and we are determined to continue.

**What are the demands of people living on Azaz-Jarabulus line? As you mentioned before the organizations like YPG and ISIS have plans for this corridor, and**

**the West, especially the US, are interested in this area. Which power do the people living here prefer to control the area? What do they think about YPG and ISIS? What kind of a government model do the people prefer?**

Syrian people simply want democracy. We demand basic human rights, we want peace, we want free, peaceful, just and honorable life. We have dealt with the elections which have been conducted through the method of open vote, closed counting for years. We, like every individual in the world, want democratic and just order; a constitutional system based on equal rights. These are the fundamental human rights. We as Syrian people have been subjected to live without these fundamental rights for 60 years. Syria is a country which consists of very different ethnic, religious and sectarian structures. Since the period of French mandate, while our differences have been embroidered as a political pattern, top executives of politics have tried to stereotype us. We do not accept this. We want to accept our differences as richness, and live peacefully as equal citizens. The differences among Syrian people have been tried to deepen and transform into animosity. In fact, there is no hostility between ordinary people. However, the master-

*Local administration bodies have been established in Jarabulus, and they have taken over actively. Attempts to establish local assembly in Azaz and Cobanbey are ongoing. The assembly here is a structure which is determined according to population rate in the region.*



minds have germinated hostility seed that comes from the past by using different ways.

As a result, Syria is like this today. The biggest contributors of this are the regime in particular and terrorist elements such as ISIS and PYD/YPG which were created in strategic regions of Syria. The masterminds have conducted social engineering in Syria. They have made deconstruction in vulnerable points of the society based on their interests. As a result, Syrian revolution which began with peaceful demonstrations has transformed into a bloody civil war. The war has been increasingly heated up in past 6 years, it has been deepened and inextricable. The regime has been an instrument to this big game by using cruel methods, by

killing its own people. The most suffering group have been civilian and innocent people. Half million people died. Millions of people have been injured. 10 million Syrians have had to move within the country or left their homeland. Syria, so to speak, has become home for terrorist organizations.

Today, we are facing a smooth operator mastermind model which keeps a foot in each terrorist element. These masterminds prolong the war by building balance of power in Syria to harm each other but not totally destroy each other. The most obvious example of this is the PYD/YPG. The reason why The USA, EU countries and/or Russia support Kurds, -or rather PYD/YPG which do not even represent Kurds, on the contrary, doom Kurds to

terrorism- is not because they love Kurds, but because these terrorist elements serve their interests. The objective here is not either to create an autonomous region for Kurds or to establish a so-called independent Kurdish state. The real objective here is keeping the Middle East under control by weakening countries in the region, especially Turkey, and terrorizing their people. The main goal of reinforcing PYD/YPG in southern border line of Turkey is to eliminate Turkey's power and impact on the Middle East. I also think that the coup attempt occurred in Turkey might be a part of this sneaky plan.

However, as we can see, even if the plan is big and strong it does not be realized and it won't be realized. The fact that Turkey has overcome the trauma after July 15 and provided state-nation embrace; that it has binded up wounds and taken important steps for political and social integration with 'Yeni Kapi Ruhu'; and that it has launched the Operation Euphrates Shield despite this troubled process have made all the plans of the masterminds failed. Turkey has begun to present a new balance by putting itself at the center. I think that the Middle East and the Islamic countries have learnt their lessons from this challenging process that Turkey

has lived and the awakening in the aftermath.

Despite all these difficulties, there is a Turkey profile which is getting stronger and influential in the field. The regions that have liberated with the Operation Euphrates Shield are being tried to recover by Turkey. On 2nd October 2016 we made some visits and meetings in Jarabulus with the members of Syrian Turkmen Assembly. We toured the region with the deputy governor of Gaziantep Nursal Cakiroglu, and the assembly committee. We visited military quarters of the Turkmen unit Sultan Murat Division which participates in the Operation Euphrates Shield and the troops subordinated to the Free Army that provides security in the region. We have observed that psychology of both our soldiers and people has changed in a positive way. Besides the will that Turkey has presented and humanitarian aid provided by Turkey, we have also seen service points provided by Turkey, such as infrastructure services like water-electricity, hospitals, shopping districts. We have seen that repaired schools have been opened, and the other schools are being restored promptly. I want to point out the issue of hospital. I m a medical practitioner served for 25 years. I found the opportunity to visit the

*With Turkey's support works for Jarabulus' recovery keep going in a systematical way. We believe that practices in Jarabulus set an example for Syria's future.*

hospital which was opened by Turkey in Jarabulus and whose all needs are met. I have seen pleasure on the faces of patients, and doctors' and nurses' eagerness to work and service with the improved working conditions. Now, with Turkey's leadership and support, hopes destroyed by the 6-year war are growing again starting with Jarabulus. These growing hopes mean a lot for Syrian people.

Regarding Turkmens' fight against terrorism, it can be said that we Turkmens are totally against all of this extremism going on in Syria. There is no extremism or radicalism in our traditions and customs. We have never had our eyes on others territory. There is no such thing in Turkmens view. As I said before we continue to fight for a democratic order in which we can live peacefully together with Syrian people. Our struggle in the field has

been as a self-defense thus far. We have only fought for our own territory which was taken from us. In this regard, our expectation from future is loud and clear. We want to live as primary component in a new Syria where there will be no terror, where there will be democracy and peace and where our rights will be guaranteed constitutionally.

**With the Operation Euphrates Shield, a security zone is being created. If this step is successful, people will not be subject of forced migration. Moreover, some of those who migrated to Turkey will return their homes. However, in order to realize this, it is not enough to cleanse the security zone from ISIS or YPG. What is important is establishing political, economic and social order in this region**



**after ISIS period. Do you have any studies regarding the issue? What model for civil authority do you plan to implement?**

The north of Aleppo consists of counties and villages which are part of Aleppo. By now Jarabulus and Cobanbey have been cleansed of terrorists. Local administration bodies have been established in Jarabulus, and they have taken over actively. Attempts to establish local assembly in Azaz and Cobanbey are ongoing. The assembly here is a structure which is determined according to population rate in the region, involves all social structures, and is participated by also Turkmens. Maintaining relationships of Aleppo maintenance, local assembly conducts administrative and local activities. It coordinates all recovery works and coming aids. It has authorizations in meeting basic needs, all administrative issues, and security and jurisdiction. We also have representatives in local administrative bodies. We are following the issue closely and being involved in it.

**Do you have any expectations from Turkey in terms of the government model that will be established in security zone? Turkey has its own institutional ca-**

**capacity. What do you expect from NGOs, especially from AFAD and Red Crescent?**

Turkey promises that it will provide humanitarian aid to the region, and it keep this promise. We have had the opportunity to see these practices in place in our Jarabulus visit. We have seen that with Turkey's support works for Jarabulus' recovery keep going in a systematical way. We believe that practices in Jarabulus set an example for Syria's future.

**Lastly, how do you evaluate political resolution initiatives in Syria? In case of revival of Geneva process, what position are you, as Turkmens, planning to take? In what framework are you planning to bring up your rights and demands on international arena?**

By now, Syrian Turkmen Assembly has not taken an active role in Geneva conferences or in other political meetings. We have had Turkmen representatives in both Syrian National Coalition, and Syrian Interim Government. However, the process of representation has not been under the initiative of Syrian Turkmen Assembly by now. After we were elected, we have held meetings with Syrian National Council regarding increasing representation.

*Operation of Euphrates Shield shows how Turkey is determined to overcome these threats. As we always mention, our another common ground with Turkey – beside that we come from same origin, we are relatives, and we speak same language-is that Turkey's security and survival of Syrian Turkmens are attached.*



Now, we have 2 Turkmen representatives working under Syrian National Council, and we are making an effort to increase this number after meetings. We have formed committees to manage this process. Meetings between the committees are continuing.

When we look at the international meetings, it can be said that unfortunately the process is dominated by the USA and Russia. There are conflicts and issue of balance of power between these two countries, and this situation affects the process negatively. Moreover, recently the meetings are held between the USA and Russia, rather than being held under Geneva roof. Thus, the meetings are interrupted constantly depending on the balances. I think that no result will be achieved until the presidential elections in the US on November 2016. I believe

that the US will possibly change the method after the election. Now, I think, the European Union and the US will have to become passive in the Middle East. In the new balance, because a center towards Syria's territorial integrity is based on, this new energy will be more successful. It can be clearly seen that the policy of the US is based on fragmentation of Syria. Historical reference of West is evident. We have witnessed fragmentation of Ottoman Empire by the West and allocation of the Middle East. The policy which they are pursuing now is based on splitting more the region which they splitted 100 years ago. We are aware of everything. We do not have any expectations from the US or the West in terms of peace or democracy.

We do not rely on policies by the US or EU countries. Therefore, we do not

think that chance of success of a peace process conducted at international level is high. Our only remedy is, in fact, social peace. Yet, there are international balances on the negotiation table as well. Besides, I think that the UN's position will also change on negotiation table. Moreover, there are two important changes that will take place in the upcoming period. Both Secretary General of the UN and the president of the USA will change. We can face a new process that will come with these changes. We wish and expect that Syria's physi-

cal and political integration will be protected, and in the next phase integration of the Middle East will be provided. If this integration will not be realized, plans for the region are already waiting. Implementation of these plans may create bigger problems for our region. We, people of this region, hope that we will eliminate all this sabotage on our unity and solidarity, and will reach a future that we deserve.

**Thank you for sharing your valued opinions with us.**

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