

# THE TIME HAS COME FREEDOM FOR ABDULLAH ÖCALAN



*Campaign members at a delegate conference of 14 unions in the UK  
London September 2019*

These are turbulent times in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party, the AKP, has been waging a war against the Kurdish population in its own country for some time; it is now also escalating militarily against gains made by Kurds in Syria and Iraq. So a peaceful political solution to the Kurdish question seems as far away as it has for a long time. The struggle of Kurdish society for self-determination has become a key element in the democratic reorganization and stabilization of Turkey as well as the entire region. In this sense, the constitutional recognition of the Kurds, guaranteeing their cultural, linguistic and political rights, is central to the solution of the Kurdish question and the democratization of Turkey.



On the Kurdish side, a central condition for peace is the ending of the isolation of Abdullah Öcalan, the most important political representative of Kurdish society. Ever since he was abducted, in violation of international law, from the Greek embassy in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, in February 1999, Öcalan has been detained on the Turkish prison island İmralı. For this reason, the international initiative Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan launched the worldwide “Free Öcalan” campaign. Millions of people have been campaigning for Öcalan’s freedom for years.

Most recently, the Kurdish Human Rights Action Group in South Africa and the Congress of South African Trade Unions have called for support for the international campaign “The Time Has Come: Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—For a Just Peace in Turkey.”

In a joint open letter, the two organizations state: “Our key objective is to promote a just peace in Turkey and the region. President Erdogan’s authoritarian regime has in the last few years pursued an internal and external policy of expansionism and aggression. These expansionist policies have negatively affected the Kurds in Turkey and undermined peace efforts in the Middle East, North Africa, the Caucasus, and Europe. The release of Abdullah Öcalan as the legitimate representative of the Kurdish people is essential to pave the way for peace in Turkey and the region. We know from our own experience in South Africa that the release of legitimate and credible leaders is inevitable and a necessary condition for any peace process.”

The campaign is aimed at the United Nations. Its initiators are pressing the UN to act with a coordinated international solidarity campaign.



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## Who is Abdullah Öcalan?

Abdullah Öcalan was born in 1949 to impoverished parents in the Kurdish southeast of Turkey in the village of Amara (Ömerli), near Urfa. Upon graduating from high school, he worked in the municipal land records office in Diyarbakir, then went on to study political science at Ankara University. In the wake of the 1971 military coup, the situation of the Kurdish people was becoming almost unbearable—the Turkish state was denying them the right to their own identity and culture. So Öcalan and other students began to conduct research on the Kurdish question.

In 1978 the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was founded, led by Öcalan for the next 21 years. He wrote many lectures and books about the culture and situation of his people in terms of philosophy, religion, gender equality, and ecology. From the outset, he developed concepts for seeking a peaceful coexistence of the peoples in the Middle East.

In 1979, as another military coup loomed in Turkey, Öcalan left the country. From abroad, he continued to lead the PKK's political activities. The 1980 coup had devastating effects. Hundreds of thousands were detained and tortured systematically, on a large scale. The PKK organized an armed resistance and initiated a guerrilla war in 1984. In the early 1990s, aware that a military solution to the conflict is not possible, Öcalan began to focus on a political solution.

The Turkish state, however, did not reciprocate the PKK's unilateral ceasefires. More than 30,000 people died in the 1990s, most of them Kurds. State-controlled death squads murdered thousands and destroyed more than 4,000 villages, driving millions of Kurds to become refugees. Torture and serious human rights violations were widespread.

### **Abduction and imprisonment**

In Europe, efforts to promote a political solution to the Kurdish question have failed. Turkey and NATO exerted strong political pressure on Italy, where Öcalan stayed for three months. Thereupon he left Italy and, after an odyssey through several European states, arrived unexpectedly in South Africa. On February 15, 1999, he was kidnapped in Kenya, in an operation carried out by several secret services, and was extradited to Turkey. The kidnapping sparked worldwide protests and uprisings on the part of Kurds. At the same time, anti-Kurdish nationalism was promoted in Turkey, which led the country to the brink of civil war.

### **Trial and the death sentence**

On June 29, 1999, after a brief show trial in İmralı, Öcalan was sentenced to death. The trial was later condemned as unfair by the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In 2002 the death penalty was abolished in Turkey,



whereupon the judiciary altered Öcalan's sentence to "intensified life imprisonment" with no possibility of parole—in other words: imprisonment until the prisoner's physical death. The ECHR condemned this punishment, too, as inhumane, but to date the consequences have been nonexistent.

## **Conditions of detention on İmralı prison island**

By European standards, Öcalan's prison conditions are unprecedented. He faces a regimen of total isolation and arbitrariness. İmralı is located in the Sea of Marmara, between the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, on the border between Europe and Asia. The island is a restricted military zone. The crossing by ship is long and very exhausting for visitors. For Abdullah Öcalan's first ten years on the island, he was the only prisoner there, guarded by more than 1,000 soldiers. In 2009 a new prison was built for him and five other prisoners. All the cells are designed for solitary confinement. Each prisoner has his own tiny yard facing the courtyard. The extreme height of the walls makes these yards look like wells.

## **Isolation and arbitrariness in "the European Guantánamo"**

Long-term isolation and solitary confinement are intended to break prisoners psychologically and physically through, among other things, sensory deprivation. Such conditions of detention are referred to as "white torture." For eleven years, Öcalan was the only prisoner on İmralı. He was in solitary confinement from the start and was not allowed to touch anyone or shake hands with anyone. He is still unable to receive letters and is the only prisoner in Turkey without access to a telephone. He was permitted to receive visits from his relatives for only 30 minutes each month and from his lawyers for an hour each week. But the authorities have repeatedly blocked these visits, so months often pass with no visits. On several occasions, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) has severely criticized this blocking of visits.

In general, the prison regime on İmralı is highly arbitrary. For one thing, the attorneys' visits are regularly bugged and recorded, with no legal basis. International human rights organizations sharply criticize Öcalan's inhumane and human-rights-violating prison conditions. The CPT has written more reports about İmralı than about any other prison, and it has repeatedly denounced the solitary confinement conditions of Öcalan and the other inmates there. So İmralı is known as "the European Guantánamo."

## **Öcalan's peace initiatives**

When the Kurdish movement shifted from a primarily military-oriented to a primarily political and peaceful strategy, Öcalan was the driving force behind the change. Ever since the first unilateral ceasefire in 1993, he has continually and urgently sought a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. In 1995 and 1998 he initiated further



unilateral ceasefires. A major turnaround began in 1999 when, against great opposition, Öcalan persuaded the Kurdish movement to concentrate on seeking a peaceful solution and to withdraw all its armed forces from Turkey. So began the longest truce in the conflict's history. It lasted five years.

## **Prison and defense writings**

In prison, Öcalan wrote numerous books, most of which have been translated. At the İmralı show trial, in which he was sentenced to death, he made a defense speech in which he argued against Kurdish separatism and in favor of the peaceful coexistence of peoples within existing political borders. In later books he developed this argument further. Despite the inhumane conditions of his detention, Öcalan is doing his best to work toward a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. For decades, his impulses, visions, and strategies have had a decisive influence on Kurdish politics. This was particularly visible in Rojava / Northeast Syria, where a movement that he inspired built, during wartime, a democratic, multiethnic and multireligious community and successfully countered the attacks of Islamic State.

## **"Road map" for negotiations with the state**

In 2009, Öcalan announced that he would draft a "road map" for peace and asked for suggestions. It sparked an extensive debate in Turkey. He completed and issued the "road map" on August 15, 2009, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the armed struggle. The document served as the basis for a process of dialogue with the state that was secret at the time.

Between 2009 and mid-2011, the Turkish government secretly sent delegations to İmralı to negotiate with Öcalan and to Oslo to meet with leading PKK members there (the so-called "Oslo Process"). Based on Öcalan's "road map," the parties agreed to three protocols. These protocols contained a step-by-step plan to end the armed conflict and make possible a political solution to the Kurdish question.

But the Turkish government subsequently decided not to implement this plan. Instead it expanded the waves of arrests of Kurdish politicians and activists, and in June 2011 it began massive military operations. In a further series of talks, Turkish state authorities conducted a direct dialogue on İmralı with Öcalan—the "İmralı process." The state confirmed the existence of these discussions at the end of 2012. On January 9, 2013, the Turkish secret service MİT murdered three Kurdish politicians, including PKK founding member Sakine Cansız, in Paris, which threatened to bring the talks to a standstill, but Öcalan still stuck to them.

At the Newroz festival in March 2013, Öcalan called on Kurdish armed units to withdraw from Turkey and expressed his hope for a democratization of Turkey. The armed units obeyed his call, reigniting hopes for peace. In the following months,



however, it became clear that the Turkish state's only goal was to disarm the PKK and that it had no interest in achieving a political solution. The last moment in this so-called "peace process" came in February 2015, when an appeal for peace by Öcalan—the "Dolmabahçe Declaration" — was read aloud in the presence of the pice prime minister.

President Erdoğan, however, changed his strategy: he terminated the dialogue process altogether and initiated another military escalation. Öcalan's isolation in the İmralı "maximum security prison" was intensified, and for years he had no contact with the outside world.

### **Honorary citizenships**

Öcalan is an honorary citizen of numerous cities and municipalities in Italy, including Milan, Palermo, and Parma.

### **The political dimension**

Öcalan's continuing isolation is a serious human rights violation, but since he is a political actor, it also has a broad political dimension. Kurdish society, as well as experts, regard him as a national leader and political representative of the Kurds. In Kurdistan and Turkey, it is common knowledge that a political solution is possible only in dialogue with Öcalan. Every Turkish government since 1999 has been aware of this fact and has held talks with Öcalan on İmralı, although none of the governments admitted it until 2010.

The government's strategy of violence and tension will necessarily to lead to an impasse, and may well result in further fighting and unnecessary bloodshed. The only alternative to violence is dialogue. Öcalan has demonstrated time and again that he is ready for such a dialogue and is able to successfully lead it to a lasting peace solution.

Meanwhile, as an author and politician, Öcalan inspires millions of people in Kurdistan and around the world. He is one of our era's most prominent political prisoners. After more than twenty years of imprisonment, his freedom is moving up on the global agenda. It must and will come—the sooner the better.



**International Initiative**

"Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan — Peace in Kurdistan"



## “İmralı is a legal black hole” Asrin Law Office

*In 2020 the Asrin Law Office, which represents Abdullah Öcalan, published an assessment of the situation on İmralı. In thirty-one points, summarized below, the report describes the prevailing system on İmralı and current developments. The Law Office appeals to all to contribute to the fight for justice and a democratic justice system.*

### **Violations of the law in İmralı prison**

1. The report opens: “2020 was the year when law, for all practical purposes, was abolished. This applies in particular to our clients in the F-type maximum security prison İmralı.” Abdullah Öcalan, Hamili Yıldırım, Veysi Aktaş and Ömer Hayri Konar have been deprived of the right to communicate with their legal counsel and with family members. This “absolute isolation” constitutes systematic torture, and the Law Office has “increasing doubts as to whether the physical and psychological integrity of our clients will be preserved.”
2. In 2019, Öcalan had an opportunity to talk to his lawyer and family members on İmralı for a limited time. Afterward his statements and assessments were published. A hunger strike arose during at the time, and the social pressure was able to partially break through the isolation. A court ruling had been used to justify the communication ban, but during this time an objection to it was upheld, and the minister of justice himself stated that nothing stood in the way of lawyer and family visits.
3. In 2019, Öcalan was able to speak to his lawyer five times and to relatives three times. During these discussions, it became clear that Öcalan continues to pursue a solution to the Kurdish question and the democratization of the Middle East, and that he has great influence. In a society that has been plagued by disasters for the last five years, this approach was perceived as hopeful and as representing the “politics of life.” The last conversations took place in August 2019. After that, all communication was once again severed.

### **Öcalan’s thoughts are to be contained**

4. On February 15, 2020, human rights organizations, legal associations, and political figures appealed to the public to call attention to the isolation regime in place on İmralı and to prevent a repetition of the hunger strike. More than 3,000 people worldwide had taken part in the 2019 hunger strike; nine people took





their own lives in protest. But no positive developments resulted in 2020. Another hunger strike started at the end of the year, and Leyla Güven was again arrested.

5. In 2020 as in previous years, the International İmralı Delegation applied to the Turkish Ministry of Justice for permission to visit Abdullah Öcalan. Members of the delegation were Melanie Gingell, Felix Padel, Julie Ward, Shavanah Taj, and Ögmundur Jónasson. On February 17 the delegation stated that İmralı is a “laboratory for both oppression and democracy,” in which human rights do not exist. The isolation system had spread from İmralı to all prisons in Turkey. The system aims to contain Öcalan’s thoughts and strip them of their effectiveness.

### **Contacts with family members in 2020**

6. In 2020 Abdullah Öcalan had two contacts with the outside world. On March 3 there was a family visit, on April 27 he had a phone call with his brother. It was public pressure that made possible these two contacts.
7. On February 27 the Turkish interior minister announced that a fire had broken out on İmralı. The March 3 family visit took place anyway. The April 27 phone call was the result of general concern about the coronavirus pandemic. It was the last contact that Öcalan and his fellow prisoners have had with the outside world. In this conversation, Öcalan said of the unpredictable situation on İmralı: “At the moment I’m fine, but I don’t know what will be in the future.”

### **Kurds as a stabilizing factor in Turkey**

8. Despite his limited circumstances, Öcalan explained in the two conversations what he thought about current political and social developments and what he foresaw for the future. These assessments were borne out over the course of the year.

On March 3 he said that Turkey was like a table with two legs and that the Kurdish people would have to be the third: “The table cannot stand on two legs, so a third leg is necessary. It cannot stand on its legs without the Kurds.” The Turkish state knows this, he said, “but it is trying to re-create Kurds that it likes. And that doesn’t work—it can’t work.”

In the April 27 telephone conversation, Öcalan pointed out that the Kurdish people were being incited against one another. An intra-Kurdish conflict, he said, would benefit neither the Kurdish people nor the general population in Turkey. “No political organization should make the mistake of thinking it can become stronger through an internal Kurdish war and that it will be granted its own state,” warned Öcalan. He directed this message to all sides: “Neither the Kurds



nor the Middle East needs a new war and more bloodshed. They need peace and unity. "

## **The CPT report and the response of the İmralı regime**

9. On August 5, 2020, the European Committee on the Prevention of Torture (CPT) published a report on the situation in the İmralı Island Prison, based on visits to Turkish prisons in May 2019. The system and isolation on İmralı, it concluded, are unacceptable. The four prisoners on the island are in absolute solitary confinement for up to nine hours a week. They are permitted to meet as a group for only six hours a week and in pairs for three more hours a week: "As a result, all the prisoners were in solitary confinement most of the time." That is, they were in isolation for 159 out of 168 hours a week. On weekends, the prisoners were isolated around the clock. The CPT stated: "In the opinion of the committee, such a situation is unacceptable."
10. In October 2020, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) passed a resolution on Turkey's repression of its opposition groups. It also mentioned the isolation of Abdullah Öcalan:

"The Assembly is deeply concerned by credible allegations of torture in police and detention centres and expects the Turkish authorities to respond promptly to these allegations. While welcoming the publication, in August 2020, of two reports prepared in 2017 and 2019 by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), the Assembly reiterates its call on the Turkish authorities to authorise, without any further delay, the publication of the 2016 CPT report and to implement all remaining CPT recommendations, including those pertaining to the situation of Mr Abdullah Öcalan and other prisoners who remain cut off from contacts with the outside world at the İmralı F-Type High-Security Closed Prison, as already referred to in its Resolution 2260 (2019)."
11. Before April 19, a court order was used to justify the ban on legal talks on İmralı. Since then, apart from the five lawyer conversations that took place in 2019, no request for a visit was answered.
12. In 2019, requests for visits from relatives and the legal guardian were rejected, with reference to imposed disciplinary penalties in the copy-paste process. In 2020, the first three applications with reference to the last disciplinary punishment from 2019 were rejected. Since January 20, 2020, requests for visits have no longer been answered.
13. In September 2020, following the August publication of the CPT report, three different prohibitions on visits and telephone contacts with the legal adviser and



family members were suddenly imposed. This reaction to the CPT report has thus exacerbated the isolation system.

### **Unanswered and rejected requests to visit**

14. In 2020, no request for a visit from the legal adviser for İmralı was answered until September 23. After September 25, client talks were prevented with reference to a six-month prohibition order by the judge in Bursa. This decision was also made using the copy-paste method.
15. The situation is similar for applications for visiting permits from family members.
16. The legal adviser made 96 requests for visits in 2020. None of them were granted: 68 were not answered, and 28 were rejected with reference to prohibition orders. Out of 50 family visit requests, 40 were not answered and nine were rejected. One application was accepted.

### **Right to communication and exchange**

17. Communication with the prisoners on İmralı has become even more important as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The Law Office made various requests to communicate with its clients and sought a temporary injunction before the Turkish Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). These urgent applications were rejected; the main application is still pending.
18. On April 27, 2020, the prisoners on İmralı were able, for the first time, to exercise their right to telephone communication. This conversation, limited to twenty minutes, represented a first in the history of the prison island, but it was also the last.
19. In 2020 lawyers and families made more than one hundred requests for permission to speak to İmralı prisoners by phone.
20. Nor could communication by letter be enforced in 2020. The Law Office sent thirty letters to its clients. Where they ended up is unknown. No mail arrived from İmralı either. There was no information at all.

### **Legal proceedings and judicial oversight**

21. İmralı prison is a legal black hole. At certain intervals new rulings are issued that are not subject to legal oversight. In the past, the ministry rejected Law Office requests for contact with İmralı by reference to defective boats and bad weather;



today the disciplinary committee or the courts produce orders using the copy-paste method.

22. The İmralı Law Office do not have full access to the files, and recently the Law Office has not even received the file numbers for the ongoing proceedings. The legal isolation is intended make the situation on İmralı permanent.
23. The legal counsel gets no further with superior courts and supervisory bodies. The enforcement system on İmralı is subject to no legal control whatsoever. In accordance with an international concept, the island has been declared a zone outside the law. The ECHR's Grand Chamber in its May 12, 2005, judgment found that the court in Öcalan's trial in Turkey had been neither independent nor impartial and that it had violated his right to a defense. The Chamber held that his trial had to be restarted. In Turkey, new proceedings are being initiated pro forma, but no new trial is taking place. Yet the ECHR and the present Council of Ministers recognize the measure as a first step. This legally questionable compromise effectively means that the ECHR's judgments, which are supposed to be binding for all members of the Council of Europe, are disregarded in several proceedings in Turkey.

With regard to the ECHR's ruling of March 18, 2014, that sentences of imprisonment until physical death with no hope of release are human rights violations, there have been no developments. This situation has resulted in thousands of new regulations being introduced in the Turkish penitentiary system.

24. In June 2014 the Turkish Constitutional Court ruled that the ban on Öcalan's books violates his freedom of thought and expression. Nonetheless subordinate courts issue continue to issue bans. They thereby override the principle that judgments made by the constitutional court are binding; the same override often occurs now in other proceedings. These examples show that the crackdown on Öcalan is not limited specifically to İmralı but encompasses Turkey's entire legal system.
25. The fact that court rulings are not enforced and that other legal proceedings too are kept in a continuous loop encourages authorities to act illegally. One concrete example: an application submitted to the ECHR in 2011 regarding isolation is still pending. Despite the aforementioned CPT reports, the ban on contact with İmralı prisoners has arbitrarily persisted for 21 years.
26. In 2020, in addition to the ongoing proceedings before regional courts in connection with its clients on İmralı, the Asrin Law Office submitted 19 applications to the Turkish Constitutional Court and one to the ECHR. At the end

of the year, 39 files were still with the constitutional court and seven with the ECHR. The provisions of the 2014 ECHR judgment are still not being met.

## Conclusions

27. The İmralı Island Prison continues to have an extraordinary status. The isolation and torture system in place there is based on illegal practices not only of the Turkish judiciary but also of the international legal system. The Council of Europe has a responsibility to ensure that the decisions of the ECHR and the CPT are enforced. The İmralı system continues to exist only with the consent or complete disregard of international institutions.
28. The İmralı system reflects the politics of the Kurdish question. The powers that benefit from the state of war reject a democratic solution to the Kurdish question—one of the main problems in the Middle East. Abdullah Öcalan, by proposing a democratic social model in which the Kurdish people live together with their neighboring peoples, offers a solution to centuries-old nation-state conflicts.
29. The solution model proposed by Öcalan, however, is suppressed by his isolation in the İmralı system. It cannot be overlooked that Öcalan has consistently advocated a democratic solution at every possible opportunity. Every contact with him has shown that.
30. Another important development in 2020 was that an international action group proclaimed October 10 as the global day for Abdullah Öcalan's freedom. Kurds and their sympathizers around the world demanded his release.
31. In order to overcome the İmralı isolation system, the universal rights to which everyone is entitled must above all be recognized. The prisoners there must be permitted to communicate with their lawyers and relatives, and the immediate isolation measures must be lifted. But the system constantly renews and reproduces itself: to truly overcome it, Abdullah Öcalan, the Kurdish people associated with him, and all other individuals and peoples must be legally equal and free. The Asrin Law Office appeals to you to contribute to this fight for law and justice.



## Open Letter of the International Campaign The Time Has Come: “Freedom for Abdullah Ocalan towards a just peace in Turkey”



Mr. António Guterres  
Secretary-General  
United Nations  
New York, NY

Via email: [sgcentral@un.org](mailto:sgcentral@un.org)

January 2021

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

The United Nations was established to maintain peace and security, and to develop friendly relations among nations. We believe that disregard for fundamental human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international treaties is a major source of ongoing armed conflicts, which require the involvement of the UN if they are ever to be solved. We commend your commitment to resolve violent conflicts through dialogue and negotiations and your support for peacebuilding in various countries marred by armed conflict. It is thus with great hope and expectations we approach you to help resolve one of the world's longstanding conflicts with concomitant gross human rights violations.

The Republic of Turkey, a UN member state, poses a fundamental threat to peace and stability in today's world. Under the Presidency of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey has become a major threat to regional and global order, pursuing aggressive foreign policy with direct military intervention in various conflict zones, thereby breaching international legal norms and regulations. Turkey's expansionist policy in Syria and Iraq, and interventions in Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Caucasus have caused or intensified bloody conflicts, adding to increasing violations of human rights, loss of life, displacement, and instability.

Turkey has shown little regard for the basic principle of sovereignty of UN member states and has openly and repeatedly violated the territorial integrity of its neighbors and other countries. In March 2018, Turkey occupied the Kurdish city of Afrin and surrounding areas in North and East Syria. As the UN failed to condemn the Turkish



invasion as an occupation and failed to take actions, Turkey has continued its occupation policy to date. In 2019, Turkey occupied the cities and surroundings areas of Ra's al-Ayn (Serêkaniyê) Tal Abyad (Girê Sipî) in North and East Syria. The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic published a 25-page report on 14 August 2020, presenting its findings resulting from investigations conducted between 11 January and 1 July 2020. The report documents how the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army may have committed war crimes of hostage-taking, cruel treatment, torture, and rape in Afrin and the surrounding area.

The Turkish state's domestic and foreign policy is characterized by misogyny, discrimination, and oppression, and the Turkish state and military have an established record of systematic and grave human rights violations against imperiled religious minorities including Yazidis, Christians, and Alawites, and against defenders of human rights and democratic opposition including those of Islamic faith. These are just a few examples how Turkey, a UN member state, is willfully ignoring its international obligations. In the last year alone, many international organizations, including the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Council, NATO, and the Arab League, as well as the UN Human Rights Council and international human rights organizations held special meetings or issued reports in which they rightly condemned Turkey's democracy backsliding and human rights violations.

We believe that the time has come to urge Turkey to comply with its obligations according to International Humanitarian law, and particularly to abide by UN treaties to which Turkey is a signatory. The Turkish government has declared martial law and thereby abrogated international law with respect to the Kurds in Turkey. The Turkish Armed Forces constantly and systematically attack Kurdish areas in north and east of Syria and in northern Iraq with impunity, risking the lives of civilians, and building and maintaining bases and outposts in these regions. This is a blatant violation against the principle of national sovereignty, which the UN seeks to uphold.

Since its foundation, Turkey has implemented a harsh and uncompromising policy of official denial of the existence of the Kurdish people, their distinct identity and culture although it is the largest non-Turkish nation within Turkey's modern borders. This campaign of denial and persecution has included extrajudicial executions, kidnappings, the destruction of thousands of villages, and other human rights violations. As a direct consequence of this policy, an armed conflict between the Turkish Armed Forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), broke out which has now lasted nearly four decades. This conflict has been variously characterized as a non-international armed conflict by many specialized organizations and international experts, including the highest court of Belgium. There have been several national and international initiatives to resolve this armed conflict in a peaceful manner, all of which have been welcomed and supported by the leader of the PKK Mr Abdullah Ocalan, who founded the PKK in 1978 and has been imprisoned in isolation now for over 20 years. Mr Ocalan, accepted by millions of Kurds as the legitimate representative of the



Kurdish people and the leader of their resistance against Turkish state oppression, played a central role in discussions of a peaceful solution from 2013 to 2015 with the Turkish government. He is indisputably the interlocutor of an honourable and effective peace. The freedom for the Kurdish people's leader Mr Abdullah Ocalan is vital to the solution of the Kurdish question.

For a peaceful solution of the Kurdish question and, more broadly, to protect human rights and ensure the implementation of humanitarian and international law, the United Nations must engage with Mr Ocalan and, as a first step, immediately address the isolation and inhumane prison conditions endured by Mr Ocalan and engage for his immediate release.

Despite the uncompromising policies of the Turkish government and their aggressive actions against those who stand for dialogue and promote peace initiatives, the Kurdish people continue to demand a peaceful and democratic solution to the Kurdish question. Across the country, the Kurdish people are punished with martial law, and Kurdish People's leader Mr Abdullah Ocalan, who has repeatedly shown his interest in working for peace and justice in Turkey, faces continued isolation and solitary confinement. Furthermore, the implementation of Abdullah Ocalan's strategy of democratic, gender-equal society and the coexistence of the ethnic and religious societies by the Kurds had led to a new hope for peace.

The Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) of the Council of Europe confirmed our assertions concerning Mr. Ocalan's inhumane prison conditions in their August 2020 report, which included a discussion of the conditions of the Imrali Island F Type Closed High Security Prison where he has been held since 1999. Regarding the conditions at Imrali, a total ban on contacts with the outside world (including correspondence) was imposed on all prisoners held at Imrali Prison, which resulted in a type of incommunicado imprisonment. The CPT stated that "such a state of affairs is not acceptable and clearly contravenes various relevant international human rights instruments and standards". Turkey's Law on the Execution of Sentences and Security Measures (LESSM), was found by the CPT to be fundamentally flawed and should be revised not only at Imrali Prison, but in the prison system as a whole. All requests by lawyers, and nearly all requests by family members, to visit Mr. Ocalan have been denied since October 2014. This represents a clear violation of basic human rights. We recall the report by UN Special Rapporteur Juan Méndez to the UN General Assembly in October 2011, where he stated that solitary confinement "can amount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment when used as a punishment" and called on all countries to ban this practice except in very exceptional circumstances, where it should be used for as short a time as possible. The CPT once again called upon the Turkish authorities to carry out a complete overhaul of the detention regime applied to prisoners sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment in Turkish prisons, in the light of the precepts set out in paragraphs 82 to 84 of the report on the 2013 visit, as the current detention regime in Turkey are contrary to the United





Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules).

Dear Mr Secretary-General,

For the sake of peace and stability in Turkey and the region, we are requesting that you activate the OHCHR Committee Against Torture to immediately investigate and address the prison conditions of Mr Abdullah Ocalan within the framework of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was signed and ratified by Turkey in 1998. We also ask you to use all of your authority as the UN Secretary-General to engage for the immediate release of the Kurdish People's leader Mr Abdullah Ocalan. At this critical juncture, we strongly urge the UN General Assembly to launch an initiative to facilitate peace talks and call on Turkey to respect its obligations under international law.

Sincerely,

Mahmoud Patel  
Chairperson  
KHRAG

Email: sakhrag@gmail.com

A copy of the letter is to be sent to:  
Dr. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN Committee Against Torture



## The “Freedom For Öcalan” Campaign

As the representative who enjoys the greatest trust of the Kurdish people and as a pioneer of a peaceful solution, Abdullah Öcalan is indispensable for achieving an end to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. However, he cannot play this role in prison, where his means of communication are extremely limited. He is almost always completely cut off from the outside world. Ending this isolation is the first, urgent step. And for that we need your support!

**Support the campaign!**

**More information at**

**[freeocalan.org](http://freeocalan.org) | [ocalanbooks.com](http://ocalanbooks.com) | [freedomforocalan.org/](http://freedomforocalan.org/)**

