

EDITORIAL

Genuine peace talks the only option

The prospect of a peaceful negotiated settlement of the Kurdish question has dimmed in recent months, with the Turkish army launching wave after wave of attacks against Kurdish guerrillas in the Kandil Mountains.

This has added to the 40 000 death toll of the 27-year armed conflict between the Turkish State and the Kurdish Workers Party.

State repression is intensifying on many fronts. The most disturbing has been claims that the Turkish army used chemicals during attacks in the mountains between 22 and 24 October, killing many guerrillas as well as plants and animals. These claims are being investigated.

Various charges are being brought against Kurdish politicians and activists. Close to 1 000 are currently on trial on a range of charges and many are denied bail.

A third case of repression relates to a co-ordinated attempt to muzzle or shut down Kurdish media in Europe. Last month, a representative of KHRAG attended a court case in Denmark where a Kurdish TV station, ROJ TV, is facing charges in terms of anti-terror laws. The station stands accused of promoting the banned PKK and inciting violence and unrest.

In Niu Isenberg, near Frankfurt in Germany, Yeni Ozgur Politieka, the only daily Kurdish newspaper in Europe, faces similar charges in a case which is likely to start in the new year.

These are all disturbing developments which do huge harm to the ideal of a just peace for the Kurds and the Turks.

The Turkish government must show leadership and get the negotiations project back on track. Banned organisations must be unbanned, the trials against Kurdish politicians must be halted, the hostilities in the mountains must cease immediately and all political prisoners must be released, including PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who is imprisoned on the island of Imrali in Turkey.

Negotiations must then commence in earnest. There is very little alternative.



Kurds in Denmark protest outside the court in Copenhagen where Kurdish TV station is charged in terms of anti-terror laws.

Critical voices muzzled

The detention and prosecution of human rights activists, journalists and Kurdish politicians continues unabated in Turkey. Ragip Zarakolu, the chairman of the Publishers Association Freedom to Publish Committee of Turkey, was detained during a large-scale action against activists on 28 October.

Earlier that day, Professor Büşra Ersanlı, a constitutional law expert and a member of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party's (BDP) intra-party constitutional commission, was detained along with close to 40 others. Scores of journalists have either been detained or charged and in Diyarbakir a two-year trial against 151 Kurdish politicians and activists is still proceeding. The charges against accused related to their alleged links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), taking part in demonstrations, criticising the state policies and participating in other peaceful activities. At least six Kurdish members of parliament are in prison in Turkey.

Zarakolu's detention has been condemned by the International Publishers Association and several intellectuals and academics have begun a petition to secure the release of Ersanlı. Meanwhile the organisation Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has expressed concern over the clampdown against journalists. Below are just a few of the many cases of action against journalists, documented by the RSF.

Nese Düzel, a journalist with the liberal daily Taraf, and his editor, Adnan Demir, are being prosecuted for two April 2010 reports containing interviews with former PKK leaders Zübeyir Aydar and Remzi Kartal. A prosecutor

asked an Istanbul court on 14 October to sentence them to seven and a half years in prison. Prosecutors at the same court are preparing to try the journalist Ertugrul Mavioglu over a report in Radikal in October 2010 that contained an interview with Murat Karayilan, one of the leaders of the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), regarded as PKK's urban wing.

A seven-and-a-half-year sentence has also been requested for Recep Okuyucu, Taraf's correspondent in the southeastern province of Batman and editor of the local newspaper Batman Medya. The prosecutor's office in the nearby city of Diyarbakir claims that he connected 53,848 times to the Firat News Agency website which the authorities have blocked because they accuse it of relaying PKK propaganda. Okuyucu's defence is that, as a journalist, he has to check a wide range of websites every day.

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Ragip Zarakolu

Kurdish Media under threat

'Challenge to democratic values'



Kurdish people do a folk dance outside the court where the ROJ TV trial was taking place on 10 October

The on going court case in Denmark against a Kurdish TV station, Roj TV, constituted a serious challenge to democratic freedoms, according to human rights activists.

The court case against ROJ TV started in August this year. According to the Peace in Kurdistan campaign, the broadcaster is accused of being in breach of article 114 of the Danish penal code by 'promoting terrorist activity', namely, promoting the actions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an organisation that was put onto the EU's list of terrorist groups in 2002. Turkey has lobbied vigorously for the closure of ROJ TV, claiming it is a mouthpiece for the PKK. The Turkish authorities have made many complaints to the Danish Radio and Television Board over the years, but none have been upheld. Judge Essa Moosa, the Chairperson of the Kurdish Human Rights Action Group (KHRAG) in South Africa has cautioned against the muzzling of important Kurdish voices and expressed his concern over the threat to media freedom in Europe.

"Khrag sent a representative to Europe in October with a view to supporting an international campaign aimed at stopping the clampdown on the Kurdish media in Europe," he said. Swedish Member of Parliament Hans Linde said that the trial represented 'a litmus test for the freedom of the press

and freedom of expression in Europe'. Former president of plaid Cymru in Wales, Dafydd Iwan, said: "I believe the ROJ-TV trial is of very great significance. I cannot think of another case where the freedom of the press, and the public's right to information, has been so starkly challenged. And the fact that it is so politically motivated makes it all the more worrying. One of the fundamental principles of democratic freedom is that the legal system is completely independent of political influence, and it seems to me blatantly obvious that there is no case in law for closing down a TV service like ROJ-TV."

He added: "The fact that Denmark, a country noted for its openness and freedom of thought, has been caught up in this political attempt at silencing what is essentially the voice of the Kurdish people is particularly sad. It is my fervent hope that the Danish judicial system will prevail on the side of freedom and the right to public information."



Dafydd Iwan

The political motives that he refers to emerges from a Wikileaks diplomatic cable which refers to a claim by a Turkish representative that, "as part of the 2009 POTUS-brokered deal that had overcome Turkish objections to the appointment of Anders Fogh Rasmussen (former Danish Prime Minister) as Nato Secretary General, Denmark had promised to clarify its legal requirements prerequisite to acceding to Turkey's request for the closure of ROJ TV." ROJ TV is licenced in Denmark and has studios in Denderleeuw, about 30km from Brussels. The station broadcasts to more than 20 million viewers in over 70 countries, in a multitude of languages,

Meanwhile Yeni Ozgur Politieka, a Kurdish daily paper based near Frankfurt, also faces charges in terms of anti-terror laws. The paper was previously closed down for three months in 2005. They went to court to enable them to resume operations.

The court case against ROJ TV and the legal proceedings against Yeni Ozgur Politieka are not isolated actions. The decision to take the matter of the newspaper to the High Court in Germany took place the same week that the ROJ TV case commenced.

Other repressive actions have taken place against Kurdish media in Europe which includes the seizure of equipment of Roj TV in Wuppertal in Germany and in Denderleeuw near Brussels.

Meanwhile Turkey, who has exerted pressure for action against Kurdish media, has among the worst press freedom records in the world. There is widespread censorship of media in Turkey and repression against journalists. There are currently 57 journalists in Turkish prison, the highest number in the world. This is according to a report by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. There are about 1 000 other cases pending against journalists.

Tutu to open conference on Kurds

The European Union Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) is organising its 8th International Conference on EU, Turkey and the Kurds in Brussels on 7 and 8 December 2011. The theme of the conference is "The Quest for Democracy in Turkey - Universal Rights and Kurdish Self-Determination and the Struggles over the New Constitution".

It is expected that the Conference will be opened by its chief patron Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. Another patron is Ms

Leyla Zana who was recently elected to the Turkish parliament. She visited South Africa as the guest of KHRAG about two years ago.

KHRAG chairperson Judge Essa Moosa will be delivering a paper entitled: "The South African Experience of the Right to Self-Determination from Apartheid to Democracy". The Conference will take place at the European Parliament. The objectives of EUTCC are very much similar to that of KHRAG and are to pro-

mote human rights for all citizens in Turkey, respect and protection of minorities and a peaceful, democratic and durable solution to the Kurdish question. A number of prominent Turks, Kurds, Academics, Journalists, Writers, Human Rights Experts, Politicians and Activists are usually invited to participate in the conference. This conference is taking place with turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa in their quest for genuine democracy and resistance against foreign domination and exploitation."

Allegations of chemical attacks investigated

Claims that Turkish forces made use of chemical weapons during attacks against Kurdish guerrillas in October, are being probed by human rights organisations. During a visit to the G20 in Cannes early in November, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has rubbished the claims as 'slander'. Mahmoud Abu Ghosh reports in Indy News Israel that: "Graphic pictures of blackened and dismembered corpses of over 24 members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

claim to show evidence of Ankara's chemical warfare against the rebels." He continues: "Lawmakers from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the Turkish Human Rights Association (IHD) are taking the charges seriously and activists are circulating gruesome pictures of some of the Kurdish rebels killed in the Kazan Valley during air raids that began on October 19. Blackened and dismembered, the corpses lie in a morgue in a nearby town with

weeping relatives nearby."

The IHD has taken chemical samples from plants in the area as well as from the clothes of 13 of those killed.

More than 10 000 Turkish soldiers are engaged in an offensive against the Kurdish Workers Party in the South Eastern regions of the country. At least 49 PKK guerrillas were killed in October, include those who are alleged to have died in chemical attacks. About 24 Turkish soldiers were killed in guerrilla attacks.

Who are the Kurdish people?

The Kurds are a people inhabiting the mountainous region that overlaps parts of Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran. The Kurds speak Kurdish which is a language belonging to the Indo-European Family. The Kurds were originally pastoralists who led a nomadic life in the mountainous region that is today known as Kurdistan. Saladin, the military leader who defeated the Crusaders was a Kurd as is the current President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani.

The Kurds have been described by some as a people without a nation. Scattered over many countries, the history of the Kurds is one of subjugation and resistance. Historically, the Kurds have been identified with the Karduchi, an ancient mountainous people. In the 7th century the Kurds were conquered by the Arabs which resulted in the adoption of Sunni Islam. Later, the Kurds would be under the sway of the Seljuk Turks, the Mongols and finally under the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Turkish Empire in the First World War and its subsequent dismemberment, the Kurds sought to establish an independent homeland. However, the dream would not materialise owing to a resurgent Turkey under Kemal Ataturk and lack of interest amongst the victorious powers. Consequently, Kurdistan or the land of the Kurds was divided between Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran.



Subsequent struggles for autonomy and independence was brutally suppressed in all four countries.

While the principal religion of the Kurds is Sunni Islam, there are significant Shiite, Christian and Jewish minorities. Yazidism or the "cult of the angels" is also a minor faith.

The Kurds speak a language that belongs to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European Language

As a symbol of Kurdish identity, the language has been vigorously suppressed in almost all the countries the Kurds live in. Restrictions relating to its use and radio and TV broadcasting exist in almost all these countries. However today, in Iraq, under the new constitution, the language has been granted official status.

The Kurdish language has numerous dialects, each of which has individual names. There is no universal script for the Kurdish language

The script in use depends on the geographic location. In Iran and Iraq, for instance, the language is written using a modified Arabic script, while, in Turkey and Syria, the Latin script is used. In the erstwhile Soviet Union, Kurdish was written using the Cyrillic alphabet.

Over the centuries, the Kurds have developed their own distinct music and dance forms. . Newroz, the Kurdish New Year is an important festival that is celebrated with great fervour, coinciding with the spring solstice which falls generally on March 21st.

There are different figures available on the number of Kurdish people in the world, but they could number about 40 million in total. 15 to 20 million Kurds live in Turkey, about 7 to 8 million in Iraq, more than 5 million in Iran and 3 million in Syria. Another 3 million Kurds are to found in the diaspora, mainly in Europe, but also in other parts of the world.

story continued....

Charges were finally presented at the end of September against two journalists with the pro-Kurdish news agency Diha (Dicle Haber Ajansi) – Kadri Kaya, its Diyarbakir bureau chief, and Erdogan Alkan, its Batman correspondent – who have been held since 15 April and will appear in court for the first time on 2 November in Diyarbakir. They are facing a possible 20-year jail sentence on charges of collaborating with the PKK and publishing propaganda on its behalf in their coverage of Kurdish demonstrations and

Turkish army operations. Alkan is also accused in connection with his coverage of the trial of a "village guard" (member of a militia that supports the army) on a charge of sexually abusing a minor in Batman. According to prosecutors, his coverage aimed to "denigrate the security forces in society's eyes."

While detentions and trials are ongoing, the armed conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish guerrillas has intensified in the last three months, leading to many deaths.



Busra Esanli

Lawyers file war crimes complaint

Lawyers in Germany have filed criminal complaints against Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and Turkey's army Chiefs of Staff for alleged war crimes committed against the Kurdish population. The complaint was lodged during Erdogan's visit to Germany at the end of October. According to a media release of the As



Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan

sociation for Democracy and International Law in Cologne, the complaint related to 'war crimes and crimes against humanity between 2003 and today, which are outlawed by laws of war'. The media release states:

"The criminal complaint is based on the German International Criminal Code which has been existing since 2002. It enables an international prosecution of outlawed war crimes for which military commanders and political superiors are responsible – even if the 'crime scene' is not in Germany. 'The complaint contains 10 exemplary 'cases' from recent years, which have been compiled on the basis of comprehensive research, the analysis of materials of the Turkish justice system and reports of respected human rights organisations. 'Among others there are cases of ex

tralegal executions, killing of combatants after taking them prisoner, torture, post-mortem mutilation and even the use of prohibited chemical weapons. Presented are the respective facts and circumstance with names, dates and means of evidence.

"The complaint is filed in the name of relatives of the victims of war crimes. The human rights organisation MAFDAD, Association for Democracy and International Law in Cologne, the writer Doris Gercke (Bella Block), professor of international law Norman Paech, MP Harald Weinberg (DIE LINKE), Dr med Gisela Penteker (IPPNW), city council member of Nuremberg Marion Padua and sociologist Martin Dolzer are also among the plaintiffs. The complaint was filed by lawyer Britta Eder and lawyer Dr Heinz-Jurgen Schneider."

KHRAG IN ACTION

In recent months, KHRAG has been very active.

Below is a summary of some areas of work. Fundraising – A successful Salsa Festival was held in September, which raised over R3 000. Two fundraisers



Dancers perform at the September fundraiser of KHRAG

are scheduled for 4 and 18 December.

International Structures – KHRAG chair Judge Essa Moosa visited Europe in September for a meeting of the European Union Commission on Turkey.

Threats against Kurdish Media – a member of KHRAG went to Europe to express solidarity with Kurdish media under threat and lay the foundation for a Save the Media campaign.

Media – the newsletter is regularly produced and distributed around the world. The website is being developed.

Signature campaign – this is ongoing. Over 6 000 signatures have been collected.

To make contact with KHRAG, email KHRAG secretary Razia Bha roochi or deputy chairperson Matt Esau at HYPERLINK "mailto:admin@khrag.org" admin@khrag.org

To support fundraising events, contact Mansoor Jaffer at HYPERLINK "mailto:mansoorjaffer@gmail.com" mansoorjaffer@gmail.com

To assist with the signature campaign, contact Hoosain Adam at HYPERLINK "mailto:adamh@hostic7.co.za" adamh@hostic7.co.za

To provide information for use on our media platforms, contact Sakeena Bock at HYPERLINK "mailto:sakeena@smartstagingsolutions.co.za" sakeena@smartstagingsolutions.co.za



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