

Free Abdullah Ocalan!

Worldwide call for Kurdish leader's release

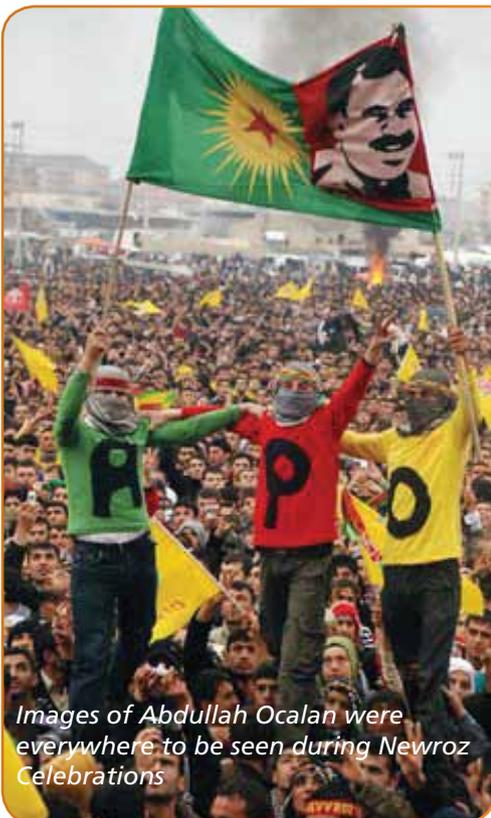
THE campaign for the release of imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan is intensifying in many parts of the world.

Ocalan, who was abducted in Kenya in 1999, while planning to travel to South Africa, is serving a life term on the Turkish island of Imrali.

An international petition will be launched soon to focus global mass campaigns, that call for the Kurdish leaders unconditional release as part of the process leading to the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question.

The Kurdish New year Newroz, celebrated by millions of Kurds throughout the world, strongly featured images of Mr Ocalan on t-shirts, posters and banners.

In February over 400 prisoners, including three deputies and mayors, embarked on a hunger strike to protest the isolation of Ocalan and to demand an end to the military and political operations. The hunger strike was suspended last month.



Images of Abdullah Ocalan were everywhere to be seen during Newroz Celebrations

A high point in the Free Ocalan campaign kicked off on 31 January with the start of the long March from Geneva to Strasbourg, a journey of 420km. The 183 activists who participated often had to brave Siberian conditions.

On 17 February, 60 000 Kurds and other pro-human rights demonstrators from all over Europe gathered in Strasbourg for one of the biggest rallies of recent times.

Strasbourg was chosen as a location because the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights is based there.

Ocalan's lawyer Mahmut Akar criticized the silence of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and European Court of Human Rights about the isolation imposed on Ocalan.

BDP Diyarbakır MP Emine Ayna also pointed out that the Kurdish people would continue to be on streets every day until the liberation of Ocalan.

During the meeting, activists of the Long March declared the formation of "Council of Initiative for Freedom for Leader Ocalan" which consists of the 183 activists of the Long March who have a symbolic value for starting the long march at the 183rd day of Ocalan's isolation.

The Council would organize committees in many parts of Europe as well as leading the organization of Freedom for Ocalan campaign in national and international area.

Firat News Agency provides some background below on the arrest and imprisonment of Ocalan.

"Ocalan is the founder of the outlawed Turkey Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which took up arms for self-rule in the mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey (Northern Kurdistan). Ocalan had been forced from his long-time home in Syria by Turkish pressure in 1998, embarked on an odyssey through several European countries and ended up in the residence of the Greek ambassador in Nairobi. He was on his way from there to the airport on February 15, 1999 when he was arrested by Turkish agents and put on a plane to Turkey."

"Following the arrest, violent protests by Kurds erupted all over Europe. Ocalan was put on trial at the heavily guarded prison island of Imrali near Istanbul and sentenced to death. His sentence was later commuted to life in prison, after Turkey abolished the death penalty in 2002.

Editorial

Throw away the hammer of repression

THE hammer of repression pounds relentlessly against the minority Kurdish population in Turkey, exacting dreadful human suffering. The latest wave of repression began almost two years ago resulting in many deaths and injuries, mass detentions, widespread media censorship and a large number of political trials. The Turkish government appears to have backtracked on its stated intention of resolving the Kurdish question. The velvet glove has been packed away and replaced by a ferocious iron fist, diminishing the prospects of a peaceful negotiated settlement between the Kurds and the Turks.

The democratic space is diminishing by the day, replaced by systematic repression, that includes arrests, trials and censorship of the media. In 2005, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan committed his party to solving the Kurdish question saying, "the Kurdish problem is my problem". In 2009, the country's president, Abdullah Gul, declared: "The biggest problem of Turkey is the Kurdish problem... It has to be solved."

These statements appear light years away as talks of reform are completely eclipsed by harsh repression. The Kurds have been without a place to call home since their territory was carved up by European powers close to a century ago. They demand basic cultural rights and partial political autonomy in parts of Turkey – perfectly reasonable aspirations. The Turkish state has to reassert its earlier commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question and convert its rhetoric into concrete action.

Firstly, the repression must stop. Secondly, the climate for bona fide negotiations must be created through releasing Abdullah Ocalan and other political prisoners, unbanning Kurdish organisations, allowing exiles to return, scrapping repressive legislation and permitting free political activity. Finally, the process of genuine negotiations must begin in earnest. A peaceful and just dispensation will set everyone free – both Kurds and Turks.

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The Kurdish question: News from around the world

NEWS briefs on the Kurdish question are compiled and distributed each week by the Peace in Kurdistan group in the United Kingdom. We present some for your information. Should you wish to have more details, you can follow-up on the website addresses provided.

Prisoners end hunger strike

20 April 2012

PKK and PAJK prisoners have ended the hunger strike they had been carrying out since 15 February. The prisoners' decision was announced by Deniz Kaya who on behalf of strikers said that "We are ending our action as of 20 April 2012 for now in line public opinion in Kurdistan, Turkey as well as Europe, our Leader's call for avoiding any death in the process of resistance and the call made by our movement." The statement by prisoners continued calling on the Turkish state and the AKP government to "end its racist attacks and policy of denial, to respect the will and mother language of the Kurdish people and to remove the isolation imposed on their leader Ocalan".

The statement ended calling on all Kurdish "organizations, institutions and persons to unite for the freedom and liberation of Kurdish people and their lands..."

<http://en.firatnews.eu/index.php?rupel=article&nuceID=4550>

ANF / NEWS DESK Newroz Clashes

18 March 2012 / eKurd

Turkish police used tear gas to stop Kurdish Newroz celebrations. Thousands of Kurds clashed with police in Istanbul and the southern city of Diyarbakir after police used water cannons and tear gas to prevent Kurdish New Year Newroz celebrations. Police fired tear gas and used water cannons to prevent thousands of Kurds from gathering at the main square in Diyarbakir, the capital of the Kurdish-majority south, an AFP correspondent said. But the crowd of more than 5,000 pressed on despite the police action.

<http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/3/turkey3833.htm>

Swoboda calls on Turkey to negotiate with PKK

13 March 2012 / ANF

Socialist group leader Hannes Swoboda called on Turkish authorities to start negotiations with the PKK again. – In a press statement at the European Parliament, Socialist group leader Hannes Swoboda called on Turkish authorities to re-launch negotiations with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) to overcome the problem of the Kurdish people.

<http://en.firatnews.org/index.php?rupel=article&nuceID=4343>

Sex, Flag, and Ocalan: Facebook Embraces Turkish Censorship

2 March 2012 / The Armenian Weekly

A recently leaked document reveals that in addition to censoring sexually explicit, violent, and hate-inciting materials, the social networking site Facebook has special rules for content deemed unacceptable to the Turkish state. Gawker.com recently posted the document leaked by a former employee of oDesk, the firm contracted to police the content shared by Facebook users.

<http://www.armenianweekly.com/2012/03/01/sex-flags-and-ocalan-facebook-embraces-turkish-censorship/>

Stop the War Coalition Motion takes a stand in support of the Kurds

12 March 2012 / Peace in Kurdistan Campaign

By a near unanimous vote the Stop the War Coalition, the leading anti-war movement in the UK, has adopted a clear and unambiguous position in support of the right of the Kurdish people to self-determination. At its annual general meeting held in central London on 3 March, delegates from STWC branches and affiliated groups from all over the country, including trade unions, overwhelmingly backed the detailed motion.

<http://peaceinkurdistancampaign.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/stop-the-war-coalition-motion-takes-a-stand-in-support-of-the-kurds/>

The Kurdish quiet spring

12 March 2012 / The Jerusalem Post

With the tectonic changes taking place in the heart of the Middle East little attention is given to developments on the periphery, one

of the most important of which is the quiet revolution taking place in Greater Kurdistan, namely among the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria. The best illustration of the new Kurdish dynamism was the congress held on February 19, 2012, in Irbil, Iraq, to commemorate the 66th anniversary of Kurdistan Republic, better known as the Mahabad Republic. This short-lived Republic was established in northwest Iran on January, 22, 1946, with Soviet support but it crumbled 11 months later on December 10, 1946, and its president, Qazi Muhammad, was hanged on March 30, 1947.

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=261599>

Number of prisoners exceeds population of four provinces

According to data published by Turkey's Ministry of Justice, the number of imprisoned detainees and convicts reached 131,317. In other words, the number of prisoners in Turkey now exceeds the population of each of the provinces of Dersim, Bayburt, Ardahan and Kilis. According to official data, a total of 131,371 detainees and convicts are currently incarcerated in Turkish prisons, 2,360 of whom are children. On 1 January 2011 the number of imprisoned detainees and convicts totalled 122,449 - a number that increased by 8,868 people within the past twelve months.

Of the 131,371 prisoners in 2012, with 36,868 people more than a third of the total are in detention, 18,540 are detained while waiting for their sentences to be finalized and 75,909 are convicted inmates.

Only in January 2012, a total of 2,713 people were arrested and put behind bars. Projecting this ratio to the course of the year, the number of prisoners would increase by 32,556 people and reach a total of 163,873 by the end of the year.

Activist brave the cold during the Long March



State **REPRESSION** escalates

STATE repression in Turkey has escalated dramatically in the last 18 months, affecting a broad cross-section of Kurdish society.

The main targets remain the minority Kurdish population, who comprise about a quarter of Turkey's citizens.

The following acts of repression have been recorded or alleged over the last few years.

- Over 8000 people including MPs, mayors, lawyers, journalists, local officials, representatives of women's movements, professors and intellectuals have been detained, 5000 of whom are still in prison due to the draconian 'anti-terror' law since 2009.
- Chemical weapons are alleged to have been deployed against the Kurds on various occasions.
- 35 Kurdish civilians, many of whom were children, were killed by a Turkish fighter aircraft in Uludere on 28th December 2011.
- Cross-border operations have continued without a break, in violation of international laws
- A nine month isolation imposed on Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, who is still held in Imrali island more than 13 years after his abduction.
- Between 2006 and 2010 more than 4 000 Kurdish youths have been detained and sentenced for expressing pro-Kurdish sentiments. These youth have been jailed simply for daring to say they are Kurds or for throwing stones at demonstrations. Children who have been released have described various torture and abuses.
- The state's actions against the country's lawyers culminated in the mass arrest of some 36 Turkish and Kurdish lawyers during simultaneous raids carried out in several Turkish cities and provinces on 22 November 2011. The lawyers arrested include members of



Lawyers in London joined in a protest organised by Peace in Kurdistan Campaign, in support of their arrested colleagues in Turkey

the legal team of Abdullah Ocalan. The lawyers remain in custody.

- The Minister of Justice, Sadullah Ergin, announced that the number of child political convicts rocketed from 17 in 2005 to 1,023 in 2010. Ergin published the related data in response to a parliamentary question submitted by Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) Deputy Pervin Buldan. The information released by Minister Ergin in reply revealed a dramatic increase in the number of children/juveniles who were convicted in the context of political cases.
- Turkey takes the lead with 12,897 convictions for terror offences which make up more than a third of all terror convictions around the world, but in the last 6 months the number of terror convictions in Turkey rocketed to 14 953. China is the second with about 7,000

convictions. The number of convictions of terror offences in Turkey has increased after amendments of the Anti-Terror Law from 273 in 2005 to 6,345 in 2009. Some of the imprisoned are Members of Parliament.

- A total of 97 journalists are behind bars. They have been arrested under allegations of membership to an organization, propaganda for an illegal organization, influencing a fair trial and praising crime and criminals. The list of convicts, defendants and people in pre-trial detention is growing. There are many problems arising from freedom of expression in Turkey, especially the Anti-Terror Law. Articles 2 and 5 are not in compliance with the case law of the ECHR and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Continues...

Ocalan was the only prisoner for a decade until new prisoners arrived in November 2009, after the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) criticised Ankara for violating Ocalan's human rights by keeping him in solitary confinement. He is allowed only visits from close relatives and his lawyers."

"Since it was established in 1984, the PKK has been fighting the Turkish state, which still denies the constitutional existence of Kurds, to establish a Kurdish state in the south east of the country, sparking

a conflict that has claimed some 45,000 lives."

"But now its aim is the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region and more cultural rights for ethnic Kurds who constitute the greatest minority in Turkey, numbering more than 20 million.

"PKK's demands included releasing PKK detainees, lifting the ban on education in Kurdish, paving the way for an autonomous democrat Kurdish system within Turkey, reducing pressure on the detained PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, stopping military action against the Kurdish party and recomposing the Turkish constitution."

"Turkey refuses to recognize its Kurdish population as a distinct minority. It has allowed some cultural rights such as limited broadcasts in the Kurdish language and private Kurdish language courses with the prodding of the European Union, but Kurdish politicians say the measures fall short of their expectations."

The PKK is considered as 'terrorist' organization by Ankara, U.S., the PKK continues to be on the blacklist list in EU despite a court ruling which overturned a decision to place the Kurdish rebel group PKK and its political wing on the European Union's terror list."

KHRAG News In Brief Fundraising

KHRAG's efforts to raise funds, which began in earnest in the second half of 2010, are very much on track. In 2012, we have already had two fundraising events – one in February and the second in April – which yielded close to R30 000 for KHRAG.

Belly dancers and community activists have joined forces to host cultural events that are hugely popular and that are generating much-needed resources for KHRAG. Committee members Cido and Beverli have been the driving forces behind the initiatives and have drawn in many supporters.

The income is used for our core work such as media, administration and events. If you wish to support KHRAG events or wish to make a donation, contact Cido at cido.yildiz@gmail.com or Beverli at beverlyfrom-london@hotmail.co.uk or 079 250 6862.

Media

We continue to produce our newsletter, KHRAG NEWS, about once a quarter. It is distributed physically and electronically all around the world. If you wish to receive the

newsletter, send an email to Mansoor Jaffer at mansoorjaffer@gmail.com

The Signature Campaign

KHRAG has embarked on a mass signature campaign to secure the release of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan. Over 7 000 signatures have been collected, the latest at a Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) event at the Good Hope Centre. A similar petition is being planned internationally and it is possible that our efforts will be joined. For further information, contact Mr

Hoosain Adam at adamh@holistic7.co.za

Chairperson attends EUTCC meeting

KHRAG chairperson Judge Essa Moosa attended a meeting of the European Union Turkey Commission in Europe last month which looked at a number of issues related to Turkey-European relations. A key matter that emerged was the concept of negotiations between the Kurds and the Turks. It was decided that a conference would be hosted in December to address this question.



Belly dancers perform at KHRAG fundraiser at Barans earlier this year

Call to the youth: Support freedom for Kurds

*By Sarah Boesak
Kurdish Youth Committee Interim Chairperson*

KHRAG Youth is a newly formed sub-committee of KHRAG (Kurdish Human Rights Action Group). Our aim, as a group of socially conscious young people, is to organise youth around human rights issues – specifically as they pertain to the Kurdish people. There have been comparisons made, and links drawn between the South African youth during our own era of Apartheid; and the youth who today live within our relatively newly founded "Rainbow Nation". However, there is one difference which significantly marks a distinction between the generations. This difference is arguably the apparent apathy and lack of commitment to human rights issues amongst South African youth.

There seems to be a general perception that once democracy had been ushered in, in

1994, South African youth had achieved the goal which they had set out for themselves and therefore no longer have a "struggle" of their own. As a result of this, we, as a generation, have seemed to have taken a backseat in any initiative which seeks to fight for social justice, equality and free-

dom outside of the boundaries of our own immediate realities. It is in this regard that KHRAG Youth call to the youth of South Africa to recognize their responsibility as global citizens. As a generation who benefitted greatly from the selflessness, sacrifice and passion of a previous youth who struggled internally and placed great pressure on the South African Apartheid regime internationally; we cannot sit idly by as the human rights of others are being violated. We believe that the best way to respect and show gratitude to the many youth who contributed to our own freedom, would be to stand up, speak out and say "never again."

KHRAG Youth calls upon all young South Africans to get involved in a fight for Freedom of the Kurdish people! To simply sit back and hide behind the excuse that "it is not our issue because it does not affect us directly" would be ignorant and selfish. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said of two different groups of people, one of whom could have arguably hidden behind the same excuse that "their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their

freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone."

The same could be said of the relationship between South African youth - who now live with the full assurance of the protection of their individual human rights; and the Kurdish people who live within a context where they are prohibited by particular laws (as implemented by the Turkish state) from practising their culture, speaking in their mother tongue and practising full and holistic political freedom. The more that one examines the circumstances of the Kurdish people, it becomes clear that their circumstances are strikingly similar to those of non-white South Africans who lived under the Apartheid regime. KHRAG Youth calls on all South African youth to help in the effort to achieve freedom and equality for the Kurdish people. If we all come together with one voice we believe that the Kurdish people can ultimately gain what they deserve as every human does - Basic Human Rights.



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