

61ST DAY OF HUNGER STRIKE OF KURDISH PRISONERS

THE HEALTH OF POLITICAL PRISONERS REACHES A CRITICAL STAGE



TAKE ACTION NOW!



Kongra Netewiya Kurdistan
Kurdistan National Congress
Congrès National du Kurdistan

KNK

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1. KNK PRESS RELEASE AND URGENT CALL



Kongreya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê
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Dear.....

THE HUNGER STRIKE of Kurdish Political Prisoners started at 12th September 2012 by 64 people in Turkish Prisons, continues into its 61th day with 10,000 now joining the action and many now on the verge of death.

At 12th September 2012, 64 Kurdish Political Prisoners held in Turkish Prisons, started their indefinite and irreversible hunger strike demanding Kurdish language rights in education and in court, and an end to the solitary confinement of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who is imprisoned on an island (he has not been allowed to meet with anyone, including his family and lawyers, for the last 473 days which is roughly 17 months). This was gradually followed by many other groups of other Kurdish political prisoners joining the hunger strike for the same demands. They were 703 people at 5th November 2012. Due to the government's insensitive approach to the matter and Prime Minister Erdogan's provocative claims, all of the Kurdish political prisoners in Turkish prisons (except for children and the elderly), roughly 10,000 people, have started the hunger strike as of 5th November. As of today 384 people, from the first three groups that started it, are facing the risk of death. This number is increasing every day.

Democratic and peaceful protests are being organised everywhere, including in Kurdistan and Turkey, in order to support the prisoners on hunger strike. Kurds and their friends are all raising their voices wherever they are. Normal life almost came to a halt in Kurdistan on 30th October 2012 due to the appeal of Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Taking on the character of a general strike, almost all the employees stopped work, students boycotted the schools, shop owners closed down the business and joined the protests, big meetings and demonstrations are conducted. Such protests are still continuing. Kurds are all standing up in Europe as well. Many international humanitarian organisations expressed their concerns on the matter.

In the 60th day of the hunger strike, which is still not getting any response from the government, a group of MPs and mayors including co-leader of BDP and Siirt MP Gültan Kışanak, KCD (Democratic Society Congress) co-leader and Van MP Aysel Tuğluk, Mayor of Diyarbakir Osman Baydemir, all started an indefinite and irreversible hunger strike in Diyarbakir in order to show solidarity with prisoners and to protest the government's insensitivity.

Despite all these actions, the Turkish Government has still not taken a step until now. Things are getting worse in contrast to ministers' claims that they are sorting out the matter. Actually this all depends on Prime Minister Erdogan. The statement of the Justice Minister on the matter was interesting. He said, "this is a political issue, I cannot do anything, it passes beyond my duties" to a

delegation of non-governmental organisations visiting him. This also proves that the problem boils down to the personality of Erdogan.

Prime Minister Erdogan either does not want to enter into discussions at all or he refuses the topic by distorting the issues. The same day Justice Minister announced that 683 people are on hunger strike, on 31st October 2012 Prime Minister Erdogan was giving a press conference accompanied with Angela Merkel in Berlin, when in response to a question, Erdogan said, “they are putting on a show, there is no hunger strike, no one is on hunger strike except for one person.” He continued similar claims on various other platforms too.

Another curious point is that Prime Minister Erdogan, when reminded that one of the requests of hunger strikers is about Mr Ocalan, suddenly started to talk about capital punishment. At 4th November 2012 in one of his party conferences, he said, “when you look at the polls, many people want capital punishment to be reinstated.” Five days later in Indonesia, at a panel in 5th Bali Democracy Forum, he openly defended capital punishment in his speech by saying “right now in Europe there is no capital punishment but did US remove it, did Japan remove it, did China remove it? That means capital punishment is also reasonable depending on the situation. We need to check ourselves, we need to be thinking of justice again, so that this humanity can find the peace again.” The timing of these statements is especially important, in a time when the Kurdish issue and freedom of Mr Ocalan are being discussed. It shows the type of mentality that we are facing.

Why are so many people due to the political reasons in the prison? Why do so many people take the risk of death through hunger strikes? Why do so many people die? Why do so many people have disrupted lives and find themselves in different conditions every day? The source of all these problems is the Kurdish Issue. All these problems are a result of the on-going deadlock in the Kurdish issue. The demands of the hunger strikers show that the Kurdish issue is a humanitarian one, as well as an issue of justice and freedom. Kurds, like all other communities, wish to live with their identity and culture freely in their own countries. The blockage has roots in the Turkish Government. As long as this blockage is not overcome, problems will carry on.

Leaving the 61th day of hunger strike behind, not a single step of solution appears on the horizon. The intransigent attitude of Prime Minister Erdogan and his government still continue. Apart from some ineffective voices in the international arena, a clear voice has not been heard yet. Western countries remain in silence. The UN, European Council, and EU keep their silence. If there was a similar reaction to the Kurdish hunger strikers as it was in the case of hunger strike of Ukrainian former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko in the past, so many people would not reach to the point of death today.

Our demand from you is that you hear the cries of the prisoners on hunger strike and you use your influence to make a step forward for the solution of this problem before people die. As DTP co-leader Gültan Kışanak said “because we know that the death is round the corner if we do not raise our voices. We once more invite everyone to raise this voice. ” We believe that you will show the required sensitivity towards this issue. Depending on how much we raise our voice on the streets and in the city squares, it will be that much possible to prevent the deaths.” We believe that you will show required sensitivity towards this issue.

Sincerely,

Kurdistan National Congress (KNK)

2. LAST STATEMENT OF THE PRISONERS

On behalf of 10,000 PKK and PAJK prisoners on hunger strike, Deniz Kaya made the last statement on September 5, 2012:

We hereby enthusiastically salute the uprising that our people, the revolutionaries and democrats of Turkey, the friends of our people in Kurdistan and in the metropolis of Turkey, are daring to carry out.

This magnificent resistance, declared with great determination, has shown to friends and foe alike; our people own up and will always own up to its freedom, to its sons and daughters, to its nation and dignity.

Our people, who stood up with a spirit of national unity, and the revolutionary democrats, who are the friends of our nation and who participated in the insurgencies with the principle of living together freely and shaping a collective future of freedom, have given the JDP state a lesson never to be forgotten. They have announced that they will never step back from their perspective of liberty.

This is our invitation to the people of Kurdistan and to the revolutionary democratic public:

No power can stand against our peoples in uprising. Our request and expectation from our people and friends is that these uprisings are not limited to a few days but will continue until the day we attain our freedom as a people.

All must know that we are at the dawn of our liberation and we must go on struggling, uninterrupted, until we are liberated from this tyrannical rule. It is our duty to transform every place into a space of opposition and insurrection, without halting or pausing until we reach our goals.

To the attention of the public; to the attention of all democratic people and human rights circles:

We have no intentions of making anyone kneel down. We are not blackmailing anyone and we will accept no one's blackmail.

We, those who are prisoners of freedom, are by this action announcing to the public and to the whole world our most basic and humane social and political rights, which are legitimately ours; ours like our mother's milk is ours.

We say:

Cruelty does not make one prosperous. We demand that these atrocities end. We say that those who become prosperous by tyranny end up in misery.

Erdoğan and his crew should know that this tyrannical order, this sultanate of cruelty, this atrocious system will bring no prosperity to those who carry them out. Those who prosper will end up in a dreadful state of being.

We are demanding an answer:

We are asking the whole world:

Who can ignore our right to defend ourselves in our native language? Who can deny our right to education in our mother tongue? Who can find it normal that a people's leader is kept in isolation and tortured? Who can reject a dialogue with our leader, who is the only assurance and the sole key to our living together? We are demanding that anyone who calls herself human respond to these questions!

We are saying "Enough already," "Edi Bese!" to this system that ignores us as a people, refuses our existence, and denies our liberty.

For resolving the Kurdish issue with peaceful and democratic means, for our peoples to live in sisterhood and fraternity, for our dignity and freedom, we are lying our bodies down for death.

It should be known:

Our action is also an appeal to Conscience, a cry of an oppressed people, a way of calling off the insults hurled at our people, and through us, at all humanity.

For our demands we are addressing only the AKP government. Our action will end when we achieve our goals. Until then new people will join us every day.

We are announcing to our people and to the public:

The hunger strike that we began on September 12 is in its 54th day (Today, 11/11/2012, 61st day). As of today, we are entering a new stage in our action. From November 5th forward, we will continue our action with the involvement of ten thousand people. Beginning Monday November 5th 2012, all of the allied prisoners except for the sick, the elderly, and the children will go on an indefinite hunger strike without rotation.

We are warning the AKP government, Prime Minister Erdoğan, and all other parties:

We are inviting all people who approach us merely casually rather than seriously, who use all means to break and denigrate our strike, and who are responsible for twisting reality by misrepresenting our truth, to sobriety.

We are saying, “let us prevent any outcome that could endanger the willpower of our peoples to live together and our social peace.”

It should be known that a resolution cannot be achieved by ignoring our demands, decrying our action and lying on television, in Europe, and in front of the whole world. On the contrary, the path to peace goes through a constructive engagement.

Our beloved people of Kurdistan and our families:

Our hunger strike joined by the insurgency of our people and transformed into national unity and will power will play a historical role and give rise to historical outcomes. We are fully convinced of that and we wish and expect that our people and friends become convinced as well.

We are calling on our Turkish sisters and brothers, on all the peoples living in Turkey and on all responsive parties in question to contribute to our resistance, to support and to give a hand to our people, who are now standing up.

The victor will be our people!

The victor will be freedom!

The victor will be peace!

The victor will be the future and democracy of our people!

Those who lose will be the enemies of liberty!

3. MAYORS START HUNGER STRIKE

Mayor Baydemir joins hunger strike

10 November 2012

BDP mayors issued a statement in Diyarbakır

Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) mayors have gathered in front of Bağlar municipality in Diyarbakır on Saturday. They called on the government and public opinion to act quickly as the hunger strike by Kurdish political prisoners has entered day 60th.

The mayors' statement was read by Diyarbakır Mayor Osman Baydemir who also announced he will join the hunger strike on behalf of all BDP mayors. Baydemir said that the Kurdish people are standing at a crossroad as no answer has been given to the call of Kurdish political prisoners on fast.

Baydemir pointed out that the demands of hunger strikers are not separated from the demand for Kurdish people's freedom and a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem.

Diyarbakır Mayor Baydemir noted that "The Kurdish people are being oppressed by the so-called KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union) operations which aimed at eliminating Kurdish legal politics and which has led to the arrest of nine thousand people since 2009".

ANF / DIYARBAKIR/AMED

4. TIME CHRONOLOGY OF POLITICAL PRISONERS' HUNGER STRIKE

Chronology of the hunger strikes

12 September: 64 prisoners of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Party of Free Women (PAJAK) start an indefinite hunger strike in 7 prisons in Turkey demanding the lifting of the isolation conditions of Abdullah Ocalan, to secure his health, security and freedom, as well as the full recognition of the Kurdish language including in education and the judicial system.

22 September: 88 more prisoners of the PKK and PAJAK join the indefinite hunger strike in 9 other prisons.

26 September: Delegations of the IHD (Human Rights Association) visit the Silivri prison: "15 hunger strikers were maltreated."

5 October: 220 more prisoners join the hunger strike.

15 October: 301 more prisoner join the hunger strike including one detained BDP MP Faysal Sariyildiz and the mayor of Van, Bekir Kaya.

16 October: 13 more prisoners start to reject food.

19 October: Giyasettin Yalcin and Sait Kaya from the e-type prison in Mersin start a hunger strike.

22 October: 10 prisoners from the M-type prison in Batman announce that they are joining the hunger strike.

23 October: Halil Dag, Celal Binci and Halil Ibrahim Celikdemir join the hunger strike in Tokat prison.

26 October: 3 women from the E-type prison including the BDP MP Gulseren Yildirim join the hunger strike.

29 October: The Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan makes his first comment on the hunger strike: “No-one is starving. The Justice Minister visited them. No-one is starving, they are all eating.”

30 October: Incidences of violence throughout Turkey. In almost all cities in Turkey and Kurdistan massive protests which are violently attacked by the Turkish security forces. There are hundreds of arrests. Battles between demonstrators and the police last until the late evening.

31 October: Erdogan describes the hunger strike at a press conference as “show” , “there is nothing like this”. At the same time the Turkish Justice Minister explains to his German colleague in Berlin that there are 683 persons in 66 prisons on hunger strike. Erdogan’s visit in Berlin is accompanied by protests of Kurds, Alevis and Armenians.

31 October: President Gul states: “We must do something about the hunger strike otherwise the solution will be even further away.”

1 November: Attacks by fascist groups on solidarity demonstration which have lasted weeks now. One bullet hit a demonstrator on the head. The man is in danger of his life.

1 November: During the continuing demonstrations in Gevece (Yuksekov) police uses tear gas and heavy weapons.

1 November: Numerous intellectuals proclaim their solidarity with the hunger strikers.

3 November: 6,000 hold solidarity demonstration with the hunger strikers in Brussels.

3 November: Mass demonstrations in Amed (Diyarbakir) were brutally attacked by Turkish security forces. Images look like a civil war.

4 November: Massive protests were held in Istanbul led by the HDK (Democratic Congress of Peoples) against Prime Minister Erdogan.

4 November: Erdogan talks about the original death sentence on Abdullah Ocalan and the possible re-introduction of capital punishment.

4 November: Deniz Kaya: “ 10, 000 prisoners will be on hunger strike starting on 5 November”.

5 November: The Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Aric declares that under certain conditions Abdullah Ocalan would again be able to see his lawyers and that a change of law will be discussed which would allow the Kurdish language to be used in courts.

5 November: The request of Abdullah Ocalan’s lawyers to visit their client is refused for the 131 time because of a “damaged ship”. They were not able to travel to the Island of Imrali to visit Ocalan since 27 July 2011.

The chronology of Kurdish political prisoners joining the hunger strike

- 12 September, 2012: 64 Kurdish Political Prisoners started to hunger strike
- 22 September, 2012: 88 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike
- 05 October, 2012: 220 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike
- 15 October, 2012: 301 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike
- 16 October, 2012: 13 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike
- 19 October, 2012: 2 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike
- 22 October, 2012: 10 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike
- 23 October, 2012: 3 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike
- 26 October, 2012: 3 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike
- 30 October, 2012: 1 Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike

12 September - 30 October: Total prisoners in hunger strike are 703.

- 05 November, 2012: 10.000 more, Kurdish Political Prisoners on hunger strike.

CPT: It's Ocalan's fundamental right to meet his lawyers

ANF, 05 November 2012

In a briefing to the press on Monday, law professor Lâtif Huseynov, President of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, said that it is Mr. Ocalan's fundamental right to meet his lawyers.

“It is a person's inalienable and primary right to see his lawyers to avoid unfair judgment, ill and insulting treatment”, CPT President said concerning the situation of Ocalan.

Concerning the hunger strike going on in Turkish prisons, Huseynov said that they were watching the protest with deep concern.

Asked about the fact that the CPT delegation did not go to Imralı island during its trip to Turkey 21 to 28 June 2012, Huseynov said that; “During the visit, we gave priority to allegations of ill-treatment of juvenile prisoners at Pozantı Prison and others but we also conveyed our expectations and concerns over Imralı to Ankara”.

According to reports received, CPT will convey a criticism and expectation report to Turkey following a series of consultations in the coming week. The Committee is expected to make an ordinary visit to Turkey next year.



IHD: 26,939 rights violations in first nine months

The government has instead imposed solitary confinement on PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) leader Abdullah Öcalan in violation of human rights."

ANF, 07 November 2012

Rise in human rights violations in Kurdish areas, reported Human Rights Association

The Human Rights Association (IHD) Diyarbakır Branch presented the Kurdish region rights violations report for the first nine months of 2012. According to the report, 26,939 rights violations and a substantial rise in the number of deaths in clashes have been registered in the region in the first nine months of the year. The report puts emphasis on the ongoing hunger strike in Turkey's prisons and the cases of violations in prisons.

Speaking at the press conference on the report, İHD Diyarbakır Secretary Raci Bilici pointed out that all disadvantaged groups of society have been subjected to various violations of rights in this period. Bilici underlined that; "No progress has been made to prevent the cases of torture and ill-treatment as well as the obstacles to the freedom of thought and expression. Public meetings and demonstrations were not permitted but intervened. Women killings and violence against women didn't record a decrease in the first months of 2012."

Indicating that armed clashes and violations of the right to live have been two main causes of the increase in deaths in the Kurdish region, Bilici pointed out that "Hundreds of people have died because of the intensifying war in the region and the security policies that the government put into effect after the general elections in 2011. The country has been dragged into chaos this year as deadlock policies escalated clashes while the government was expected to resolve the Kurdish problem through democratic ways." The IHD secretary also noted that this conflict environment has brought along civilian deaths, evacuations of villages, destruction of nature and many other violations of rights.

Bilici continued saying that; **"We regret to say that the government has presented no concrete plan to stop the bloodshed in the country despite all calls various circles of the society have voiced for permanent peace and negotiation. The government has instead imposed solitary confinement on PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in violation of human rights."**

Commenting on the current hunger strike in Turkey's prisons as a consequence of the government's isolation policy and the conflict in the Kurdish region, Bilici repeated their call to the government to take urgent steps to satisfy the "legitimate rights" prisoners have highlighted.

Below is a list of the statistical figures of main violations in the first nine months of 2012;

- * 200 members of security forces died, 385 injured in gunfights
- * 193 PKK militants died, 9 injured in gunfights
- * 35 civilians killed, 165 injured in unsolved murders, extrajudicial killings and gunfights
- * 17 people died in cases of suspected deaths
- * 23 people died and 3 injured due to official neglect or mistake
- * 5 soldiers/police officers committed suicide and 4 attempted suicide
- * 22 women committed suicide and 5 attempted suicide
- * 28 men committed suicide and 14 attempted suicide

- * 12 children committed suicide and 4 attempted suicide
- * 3,177 people taken into custody and 1,162 people jailed
- * 665 cases of torture and inhuman treatment
- * 9,624 asylum seekers and immigrants taken into custody
- * 104 people detained by PKK militants
- * 112 cases of intervention in social events, 182 people injured
- * 1,715 subjected to investigation, lawsuit and penalty
- * 98 political parties, unions, associations and cultural institutions subjected to raid and attack
- * 11 political parties, unions, associations and cultural institutions closed
- * 634 publications recalled and banned
- * 326 cases of mother tongue ban in self-defense
- * 3014 rights violations in prisons
- * 248 cases of violation of economic and social rights
- * 12 villages evacuated and burned down
- * 32 lands and fields burnt down
- * 66 cases of land, pasturage and grazing prohibition
- * 46 cases of right violations as a result of military operations
- * Claims of 11 mass graves where 66 people are buried
- * Four mass graves discovered with 37 people buried in them
- * 21 cases of treatment on bodies of dead militants
- * 4,448 cases of other violations

Total number of violations: 26,939

5. WORLDWIDE REACTIONS AND CALLS FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS



Document - Turkey: Hunger strikers denied medical care

UA: 329/12 Index: EUR 44/022/2012 Turkey Date: 9 November 2012

URGENT ACTION

HUNGER STRIKERS DENIED MEDICAL CARE

Hundreds are on hunger strike (some of them since 12 September) in prisons across Turkey. Lawyers told Amnesty International that prison authorities have denied many hunger strikers access to medical care, further threatening their health.

On 12 September, around 60 prisoners began a hunger strike in seven prisons across Turkey. The hunger strikes were initiated as a protest against the authorities' longstanding refusal to allow Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan to meet with his lawyers and to demand the provision of education in the Kurdish language. Since September, the number of hunger strikes has grown. According to the Ministry of Justice, 682 prisoners in 67 prisons had joined the hunger strike by 2 November.

Lawyers representing the hunger strikers told Amnesty International that prison doctors are routinely refusing to conduct medical examinations of the hunger strikers, including checking the prisoners' blood pressure. Lawyers also said that in some cases, hunger strikers are being denied access to vital vitamins taken to the prison by the lawyers. One prisoner on hunger strike in Sincan F-type prison was allegedly made to travel 36 hours for a court hearing, despite severe mobility problems and a doctor's report advising against the travel.

There are further concerns regarding reports that prisoners on hunger strike in Silivri and Şakran prisons have been placed in solitary confinement, and guards at Tekirdağ prison were ill-treating prisoners as a result of their participation in the hunger strike protests.

Please write immediately in Turkish or your own language:

- Reminding the authorities that hunger strikers are engaging in a peaceful form of protest and the Turkish authorities have an obligation to respect their right to freedom of expression, including their right to protest;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that the hunger strikers have adequate access to qualified medical professionals and any medical assessment, advice and any treatment that they will accept voluntarily based on this assessment, and to ensure that there is no unjustifiable restriction on hunger striking prisoners from receiving vitamins provided by their lawyers or family members;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that no punitive measures are taken against prisoners on hunger strike and the absolute prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment is upheld; and to institute a prompt, thorough, impartial and effective investigations into allegations that prisoners in Silivri, Şakran and Tekirdağ prison were ill-treated or otherwise punished for their participation in the hunger strikes.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 DECEMBER 2012 TO:

Ministry of Justice

Sadullah Ergin

Adalet Bakanı

Adalet Bakanlığı

06659 Ankara, Turkey

Fax: +90 312 417 71 13 (keep trying)

Email: sadullahergin@adalet.gov.tr

Salutation: Dear Minister

Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights

Ayhan Sefer Üstün

Commission Chairperson

TBMM İnsan Hakları İnceleme Komisyonu

Bakanlıklar, 06543 Ankara, Turkey

Fax: +90 312 420 53 94

Email: insanhaklari@tbmm.gov.tr

Salutation: Dear Mr Üstün

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

A. INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND ACADEMICS PETITION CAMPAIGN, ARTISTS' CALL FROM ISTANBUL,

An international group of social scientists with research interests in the Kurdish issue launched a petition campaign calling on the Turkish government to address the demands of the Kurdish political prisoners whose hunger strike has entered a critical phase.

The petitioners declare their **"full support to the Kurdish political prisoners' demands, which, they believe, are among fundamental human rights"**.

The petition emphasizes that the **"international community's opinion on Turkey will be strongly shaped by the way the present hunger strikes are handled and reminds the addressees, including the President, Prime Minister and Justice Minister of Turkey, that they will be personally responsible should this protest end in a human tragedy"**.

The petition has received great interest and support from academic circles around the world, reaching over one thousand signatures on its first day. Some internationally renowned social scientists sent support messages to the campaign.

<http://www.change.org/petitions/hunger-strikers-in-turkish-prisons-engage-in-constructive-dialogue-with-prisoners#>

B. ARTISTS' CALL FROM ISTANBUL

ANF, 31 October 2012

A group of prominent artists and authors in Turkey released a joint statement calling for the demands by prisoners on hunger strike to be met.

Artists came together following the call by author Vedat Türkali.

The artists' statement on the demonstration was signed by many writers and intellectuals including author Murathan Mungan, Kardeş Türküler music band, director Kazım Öz, artist Ferhat Tunç, actor Erkan Can.

We hereby publish the full text of the joint statement by artist calling on the Turkish government to meet prisoners' demands: "You may ignore the hunger strike but you already came within an inch of coming face to face with what you have ignored. You are responding to the most basic demands with your boundless arrogance and you see this ability of yours as an accomplishment. Do not ever let human death become a joy pleasing your arrogance.

For the sake of the right to live, stand by that whatever you believe in.

Put an end to your being an instrument to the policies of denial that have been followed for years now.

Never before has any government rejected so few and concrete demands. Meet the highlighted demands. Instead of loving yourself so much, give some of your love to people. Understand it now that no government can remain standing against the human power of resistance.

There is nothing scary about being a human being. You, temporary rulers of the government; please be decent.

Listen to prisoners and not be a slave to your arrogance.

Any single person suffering from hunger points to the resistance or death of humanity.

Do not be late. We the signers shall continue to speak for justice, peace and freedom until the very last moment.

Do not stand so distant from us.

Do not sadden, do not get sad.

Do not die killing.

C. Letter to Turkish Prime Minister

PM Erdogan Must Respond to the Demands of the Kurdish Hunger Strikers

Peace in Kurdistan Campaign

OPEN LETTER TO TURKISH PRIME MINISTER TAYYIP ERDOGAN

Hundreds of Kurdish prisoners are now taking part in a hunger strike which they have declared is to be indefinite.

This hunger strike began on 12 September, a not insignificant date in Turkey's political history, with 63 people, including 13 women, in seven prisons. The numbers have grown rapidly with hundreds more Kurdish political prisoners joining the action and it is reported that 600 prisoners are currently on indefinite hunger strike.

The prisoners' demands appear simple and reasonable: the right to education and legal defence in their mother tongue of Kurdish; and the start of direct peace talks to resolve the outstanding conflict by peaceful, constitutional means and with the full participation of imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan.

If nothing is done to meet the demands of the hunger strikers, more martyrs will be added to the Kurdish dead and it is feared that the situation could rapidly take the country to the brink of chaos. Renewed conflict would become inevitable if this action were to end in fatalities. We therefore call on the Turkish government to respond positively to the legitimate demands made by the hunger strikers.

The majority of those who have joined this action are members of the Peace and Democracy Party, BDP, including elected politicians and officials; they are responsible citizens striving to do the best for their communities who have found themselves detained and gaoled on the basis of largely spurious allegations.

It is clear that the Kurdish citizens in very large numbers regard Ocalan as their political leader and they have chosen him to speak on their behalf. Ocalan himself has shown consistently that he is ready to reach agreement; he has put forward many constructive proposals as a basis for negotiations.

It is right to see Ocalan as a responsible leader of a responsible peace-loving people. It is high time that Turkey changes its approach to the Kurds and ceases its attempts to demonise the Kurdish people, their

organisations and their leaders; Kurds should not be seen as enemies in a war but as partners in the pursuit of peace. They want to help build a modern, truly democratic Turkey.

It can hardly be surprising that it is from inside Turkey's notorious prisons that this drastic action has been initiated. For nearly four years, the world has looked on aghast as Turkey has been imprisoning Kurds in their thousands.

Ostensibly, this is part of a counter-terrorism strategy to safeguard the unity of the country allegedly threatened by guerrilla violence. In reality, the anti-terror law has been used to punish, isolate, and silence the Kurdish community.

Anyone who has been courageous enough to criticise Turkey's militarisation of the Kurdish conflict, or who has demanded the right to speak their own language in school or to have their Kurdish identity recognised, is criminalised and arrested.

The Turkish Government has a responsibility to resolve this outstanding conflict in a spirit of justice, democratic inclusiveness and respect for the rights of all the country's citizens.

The individuals who have taken their decision to join this hunger strike are demonstrating their dedication and commitment to a cause that is unquestionably just and right.

The men and women on hunger strike see no other avenues open to them when faced with a situation where elected politicians are criminalised and Kurdish community leaders are harassed, detained and sent to court to face grotesque show trials.

These repressive measures shame Turkey and represent a dangerous political course that is now threatening to bring calamity on the country. All Turkey's citizens, Turks and Kurds equally, will suffer as will future generations if the conflict and animosities are permitted to linger on and escalate.

We have no hesitation in expressing support for the demands of those on hunger strike -

- **Education in the mother tongue;**
- **The right to use Kurdish in defence in trials;**
- **Respect for the Kurdish people's democratic rights;**

Freedom for Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Lord Avebury; Lord Rea ; Lord Hylton; Lord Dholakia; Jeremy Corbyn MP; Hywel Williams MP; Martin McGuinness MP; Conor Murphy MP; Michelle Gildernew MP; Paul Maskey MP; Pat Doherty MP; Seán Crowe, Teachta Dala and Sinn Féin spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Diaspora; Elfyn Llwyd MP; John Austin, former MP; Jim Cunningham MP; Mike Hancock MP; Jill Evans MEP; Jean Lambert MEP; Ana Miranda MEP; Gareth Peirce, human rights lawyer; Prof Bill Bowring; Michael Mansfield QC, human rights lawyer; Bruce Kent, Vice-President Pax Christi; Margaret Owen OBE; Prof Mary Davis; Louise Christian, human rights lawyer; Frances Webber, human rights lawyer; Stan Newens, President "Liberation"; Revd Richard Carter, Priest, St Martin-in-the-Fields, London; Julie Christie; Noam Chomsky; John Berger; Edward Albee; Mark Thomas; Joe Ryan, Chair of Westminster Justice and Peace Commission; Dafydd Iwan, Past President, Plaid Cymru; Melanie Gingell, barrister; Martha Jean Baker, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; Val Swain, NETPOL (Network for Police Monitoring); Dr Tove Skutnabb-Kangas; Robert Phillipson, Professor emeritus; Kariane Westrheim, PhD, Associate professor University of Bergen, Chair of EUTCC; Hans Branscheidt, BOD EUTCC, Co-Editor of Development Magazine "Weltsichten", Author; Prof Michael M. Gunter, Dept. of Political Science, Tennessee Technological University; Tony Simpson, Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation; Barry White, NUJ delegate to the European Federation of Journalists - personal capacity; Dr Vicki Sentas, School of Law, University of New South Wales, Sydney; Dr Alexandra Pillen, Department of Anthropology, UCL; Dr Vicki Sentas, School of Law, University of New South Wales, Sydney; Khatchatur I. Pilikian / Professor of Music & Art / Socialist History Society; Nick Hildyard, policy analyst; Hugo Charlton, barrister; Maggie Bowden, General Secretary, Liberation; Alain Hertzmann, Branch Secretary London LNW9708 Unite; Stephen Smellie, Depute Convenor, UNISON Scotland; Paul Burnham,

member of the UNISON Housing Associations Branch; Keith Flett, Secretary of the Haringey Trades Union Council; David Morgan, Peace in Kurdistan Campaign; Melanie Sirinathsingh, Peace in Kurdistan Campaign; Estella Schmid, Peace in Kurdistan Campaign

4 November 2012

*For information contact: **Peace in Kurdistan:** Campaign for a political solution of the Kurdish Question;*

Email: estella24@tiscali.co.uk; www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.wordpress.com

Contacts Estella Schmid 020 7586 5892 & Melanie Sirinathsingh – Tel: 020 7272 7890

Fax: 020 7263 0596

D. Letter to Turkish Prime Minister

Letter from Members of the group Ecologists in France to Erdogan:

Dear Prime Minister,

An indefinite hunger strike is being carried out by hundreds of Kurdish prisoners in more than 60 prisons in Turkey and the movement has grown to an unprecedented scale. Colleagues and friends, deputies, mayors, regional presidents, and lawyers, who have been remanded in custody, some of them for several years, have joined the movement that began on September 12.

Mr Erdogan, the hunger strikers demand that your government starts negotiations with Abdullah Öcalan in order to solve the Kurdish question. They also demand the end to the total isolation in which he has been held for more than a year and a half.

As Mr. Hasip Kaplan, Sirnak MP, BDP vice president of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and member of the Union of European lawyers, stated, the hunger strike has entered a critical phase. Prisoners' families, currently being supported by many civil society organizations, have also expressed serious concerns about the health of strikers.

Please let us share our concerns with you. We request that you respond to the demands of Kurdish prisoners in order to suspend this movement, the consequences of which will be extremely serious for all.

A hecatomb such as this may leave deep scars in Turkey, and Turkey will not emerge with its democratic ideals intact, either inside or outside its borders.

All those who adhere to principles of democracy expect negotiations to be opened to enable a political solution to the Kurdish question.

It seems to us that the time has come.

Please accept, Mr. Prime Minister, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Members of the group Ecologists:

Jean Louis Roumegas ; Noel Mamere ; Véronique Massonneau ; Sergio Coronado ; Eric Alauzet ;
Danielle Auroi ; Isabelle Attard ; Barbara Pompili ; Denis Baupin ; Laurence Abeille ; Brigitte Alain ;
Christophe Cavard ; Paul Molac ; Michele Bonneton ; François Michel Lambert ; François de Rugy ;
Eva Sas

D. STATEMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL PARTIES, PERSONALITIES AND NGOs



Yasar Kemal: *"The government and all the officials were responsible for all of the previous hunger strikes. And this time they are all responsible as well. Today, sons and fathers of those hunger strikes will also be a part of this struggle; and it will destroy a generation". The following statements are written in the text. "Watching the death of a human being from hunger is the greatest suffering of all. This is not worthy of humanity, ever. Today demands that peoples are making at the expense of their life are basic*

human rights in democracies. While the solution is possible, if deaths are not avoided, the government, opposition, media and all of us will be responsible for the consequences and loss of life. Peace, in this country, is everyone's right and desire. All of us should work opposing the new barriers that intended to prevent the Peace, to pave the way for peace. I would be grateful to everyone work for this ideals, sincerely."



Musician Zülfü Livaneli, calling on Prime Minister Erdogan, said that *"Please change your attitude, you have already accepted these terms and conditions, do not consider this as a defeat, there are demands in a democratic society, a human being is holding the power is not the absolute ruler, please listen to the demands and change your attitude. Because there is no one else could solve this matter other than the Prime Minister. This means that, the Prime Minister would be responsible for the deaths as well"*



Enrico Palandri, Reader in Italian Literature and Writer in Residence: *"The rights of Kurds are clear and legitimate and banning the use of one's own language has always been a feature of nationalisms, i.e. of fascisms. I support the prisoners on hunger strike and hope to be of any help in rising their voice. I hope one day to visit their country, a country of free men and women. And I hope this day to be near."*



Sergio Segio, former political prisoner and writer:

"Whoever fights in prison, against prison, for his/her freedom and rights, for the freedom and rights of everybody, is my brother and sister.

Who in this struggle is putting his health and life at risk, will be my comrade in this journey, forever, and my master. In my long experience as a political prisoner in Italy many times I had to reclaim my dignity and rights through hunger strike, although in a less appalling situation than that of my Kurdish brothers and sisters. I know what it means to push yourself to the limits and I know how hard it is trying not to feel alone in this extreme battle.

For all of us who are watching this from the comfort of our houses, sometimes with distraction or passively, is necessary to remember the old saying used by Primo Levi: "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, then who am I? And if not now, when? "

For the hundreds of political Kurdish prisoners who are putting their life at risk since 12 September, the "when" could never arrived. It depends on each and everyone of us as well.



Riccardo de Gennaro, writer and editor of the Italian magazine *Reportage* wrote: *"With this hunger strike to ask for the end of isolation of their leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and the right to speak their mother tongue in court, the Kurdish political prisoners are showing the Turkish government what democracy is. We hope Prime Minister Erdogan will choose dialogue before is too late"*



Feminist theorist **Professor Judith Butler** of University of California, Berkeley, wrote: *"The Turkish government must enter into serious dialogue with these prisoners, who now risk their lives to expose the injustice under which they live."*



Noam Chomsky stated: *"Elementary humanity requires that the just and desperate plea of these prisoners for dialogue should be answered quickly and appropriately, without delay."*



Bishop Jacques Gaillot wrote a letter to PM Erdogan:

"Dear Prime Minister Erdogan,

Please let me inform you regarding the hunger strikers.

To me they are brothers. They are part of my family.

Their pain hurts me; I would like to cry out their voice.

I address you as a man of peace. I know the peace is scary; there is a risk to bring a peace. Is not it the time to remove the isolation on Mr Öcalan

and to begin the dialogue with him to open a path of the peace and finally solve the Kurdish question?

I believe that bringing peace is possible and the peace is possible now more than ever.

It would be a great honour for Turkey.

I beg you to believe my very respectful feelings, Mr. Prime Minister."



Congressman **Bob Filner** has written a letter to the BDP office in Washington saying that he has *been "closely watching the hunger strike that my Kurdish colleagues, mayors and others BDP affiliates are currently participating in"*. Congressman Filner points out that *"history has taught us the valuable lesson that using force against innocent people seeking a peaceful solution only damages democracy"*. The Democratic

Party congressman urged *'the Turkish government to take real and immediate action to resolve the dispute with the Kurds. I am confident that the Turkish democracy will reach fair and just decisions that will protect the lives and interests of all its citizens'*.



Melda Onur, member of parliament for the republican party CHP: *"People in public don't develop empathy. , Who doesn't belong to me, can just die; I don't care.' But the political attitude of the people, who are going to die, shouldn't be reason for our lack of sensibility. We mustn't watch death. The consequences for Turkey would be very high. If we don't want the hunger strike to reach the proportions of the strike in 2001 we need to act immediately!"*



Gregor Gysi, political faction leader of the German party, Die Linke (the Left): *"Why is it that people don't allow the Kurdish men and women to keep their culture, their language and their nationality? What is that bad about it?"*



Claudia Roth and Cem Özdemir, Federal chairmen of , Bündnis 90/ die Grünen' (the Green Party): *"The Turkish home affairs only can contribute to a social and sociopolitical peace in the country, if democratic values, human and citizen rights and freedom do apply completely and if they can be lived. They're the basis for the government to negotiate with the hundreds of prisoners in Turkish jails and for taking up the criticism of the situation in the jails and the justice constructively."*



**EUROPEAN
COMMISSION**

EU Commission for Enlargement concerned about hunger strike

02 November 2012

EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Mr Stefan Füle (in charge also of the EU-Turkey Accession talks) expressed concerns over the health situation of Kurdish political prisoners on fast and called on the Turkish government to make efforts in the scope of international human rights norms.

The statement says that **"The European Commission is following the situation closely and is concerned about reports that the health condition of the prisoners on hunger strike is deteriorating"**.

The statement reiterates that **"The Commission calls on the hunger strikers not to endanger their**

health and lives. We call for efforts to prevent a further deterioration in the health of the prisoners in line with international human rights norms".

As a general principle, the Commission "reiterates the importance to adequately address the Kurdish issue. The South-East needs peace, democracy and stability as well as social, economic and cultural development. This can only be achieved via consensus over concrete measures expanding the social, economic and cultural rights of the people living in the region".

The statement ends by saying that "Finding a solution to the Kurdish issue and to all the problems in the South-East requires the widest possible contribution of all democratic forces, and an open and frank public discussion that can be conducted in the full respect of basic fundamental freedoms."



S&Ds call for more sensitivity from Turkey over jailed Kurds on hunger strike

The president of the Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Hannes Swoboda, today expressed serious concerns about the 654 Kurdish prisoners who have now been on hunger strike for 57 days. He called on the Turkish prime minister to show more flexibility on this humanitarian issue.

"The Turkish authorities' indifference to this ongoing suffering seems inhumane to us and to European opinion in general – and could create problems for EU-Turkish relations," warned Hannes Swoboda.

"According to the report from the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), the health of the strikers is seriously deteriorating day by day. We invite the Turkish prime minister to show more sensibility on this human issue, especially for those who have demonstrated their political opposition in a peaceful way.

"We believe that recognition of the justified Kurdish demands by the Turkish authorities could be constructive in the efforts to calm the situation. It could also help open democratic dialogue to end the violence, isolate the terrorists of the PKK and to find political solutions to the Kurdish problem."



GUE/NGL supports the demands of the Kurdish hunger strikers

Brussels, 8 November 2012. In a press conference in the European Parliament today, Members of the European Parliament from European United Left / Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) gave their support to the demands of the Kurdish hunger strikers in Turkey. The hunger strikers continue their protest action since 12 September.

Jürgen Klute, coordinator of the European Parliament Kurds Friendship Group, and Marie-Christine Vergiat, MEP from France, expressed their solidarity with the demands of the Kurdish

prisoners: ***"The GUE/NGL is in solidarity with the hunger strikers and we support their demands"***.

The Kurdish hunger strikers are demanding the right to use the Kurdish language in judicial proceedings, the right to education and teaching in Kurdish, and an end to the isolation of Öcalan and his release.

GUE/NGL MEPs underlined that the EU countries, which don't put pressure over Turkey and continue to tolerate its anti-democratic policy towards Kurds, are becoming accomplices of the Turkish government and prolong the continuing conflict, instead of contributing constructively for finding peaceful solution of the Kurdish question in Turkey. At the same time, MEPs advised the Kurdish activists to not use wrong methods in their justified struggle.

"Around 700 political prisoners in Turkish prisons are currently on hunger strike, with more and more joining every day," reported GUE/NGL MEP Marie-Christine Vergiat, who returned yesterday from a delegation of elected representatives to Turkey.

Speaking in the European Parliament, Marie-Christine Vergiat continued: ***"I can report that the situation has significantly deteriorated since my last visit in February. There has been an unprecedented wave of arrests since the last general elections. There are 140,000 prisoners, out of which 10,000 are there for political activities. Among them are six Kurdish elected parliamentarians, many mayors, journalists, lawyers and trade unionists. Some have been imprisoned for up to four years without trial. This constitutes arbitrary detention and is not acceptable in a country that calls itself democratic."***

During her visit in Turkey, MEP Vergiat tried to meet some of the Kurdish jailed hunger strikers, but she didn't receive permission from the Turkish authorities. MEP Marie-Christine Vergiat was disappointed that she could not get any assistance from French and other EU Embassies to meet the hunger strikers either.

With reference to Prime Minister Erdogan's denial of a mass hunger strike in his country, German MEP Klute said: ***"It is a shame that the German government has offered Erdogan a platform for those lies. Turkey signed up to the Copenhagen criteria and it must implement these values into daily life."***

Eyyup Doru, Europe representative of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), called for an end to the contradictory statements from Turkish leaders and condemned the continuing Turkish government policy of *"terror and arrests"*. He underlined that the hunger strikers' demands are reasonable and could easily be fulfilled by the Turkish government.



Zana urges EU to act on the situation of Kurdish hunger strikers

The Kurdish parliamentarian Leyla Zana sent an open letter to the President of the European Parliament (EP), Martin Schulz, European Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle and Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland to urge for pressure on Turkey to fulfil its obligations in order to prevent any loss of life of 683 Kurdish hunger strikers in Turkey.

The hunger strike, which started on 12 September 2012, entered in its 53rd day and the health situation of about twenty people is in danger. While many thousands Kurds demonstrate all over Kurdistan, Turkey and Europe as sign of solidarity with the hunger strikers, Kurdish politicians mobilize their international contacts in order to seek support for the Kurdish cause.

In her letter, MP Leyla Zana calls on EU politicians and international organisations to ***"urge Turkish authorities to fulfil obligations stemming from the international conventions signed by Republic of Turkey without further delay and to implement a constructive dialogue in a human and peaceful***

manner meeting the human and political demands of hunger strikes immediately, which are among the fundamental human rights, in order to prevent any loss of life of my people's children".

The letter has been sent to the President of the European Parliament, MEP Mr. Martin SCHULZ, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Thorbjorn JAGLAND, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP, Mr. Štefan FULE, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Mr. Nils MUIZNIEKS, Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), the Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, Ms. Hélène Flautre, the Chair of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Mr. Mikael Gustafsson, the Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, Ms. Barbara Lochbihler and Sakharov Prize Laureates.

06.11.2012 - DIE LINKE



Solidarity with political prisoners in Turkey

The parliamentary party Die Linke declares its solidarity with the hunger strikers in Turkey.

The human rights situation in Turkey has intensified dramatically. More than 100 journalists, many trade unionists and intellectuals and opposition figures included 10.000 political prisoners - mostly Kurdish politicians - now have been arrested in prisons. About 700 of them, including members of parliament, journalists and mayors, partly since the 12th September started to an indefinite hunger strike. While the health of a number of prisoners on hunger strike has become life-threatening, to another 10,000 political prisoners have already joined the hunger strike the 5th November. **Their main demands are ending the isolation of many prisoners, including Abdullah Ocalan, and the approval of the Kurdish language in courts and schools. The group calls on the federal government to take the bad human rights situation in Turkey to finally acknowledge and Erdogan's government in its xenophobic and repressive policies give up not to continue. The Group calls on the Erdogan government to finally come into negotiations with the hunger strikers.**



Sinn Féin MPs signed open letter to Turkish PM

01 November 2012

Letter to urge PM to listen to demands of hunger strikers

Sinn Féin deputies and spokespeople in Dublin and Belfast, Sean Crowe and Pat Sheehan have signed an opened letter to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan urging him to hear the calls of hundreds of prisoners on hunger strike. The letter was promoted by **"Peace in Kurdistan. Campaign for a political solution of the Kurdish Question"**.

The letter states **"The Turkish Government has a responsibility to resolve this outstanding conflict in a spirit of justice, democratic inclusiveness and respect for the rights of all the country's citizens"**.

And it further states **"The individuals who have taken their decision to join this hunger strike are demonstrating their dedication and commitment to a cause that is unquestionably just and right"**.

Pointing out that **"The men and women on hunger strike see no other avenues open to them when faced with a situation where elected politicians are criminalised and Kurdish community leaders are harassed, detained and sent to court to face grotesque show trials"**.

The letter ends by underlining that **"These repressive measures shame Turkey and represent a dangerous political course that is now threatening to bring calamity on the country. All Turkey's citizens, Turks and Kurds equally, will suffer as will future generations if the conflict and animosities are permitted to linger on and escalate"**.

The signatories underlined that **"We have no hesitation in expressing support for the demands of those on hunger strike – Education in the mother tongue;**

The right to use Kurdish in defence in trials;

Respect for the Kurdish people's democratic rights;

Freedom for Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan".



IPPNW

IPPNW has grave concern about prisoners' health conditions!

IPPNW-Press Release on 29.10.2012

The medical peace organization IPPNW manifested on the occasion of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Germany on 30/10/2012 regarding to the extremely concerned about the health of more than 700 hunger strikers in Turkish prisons. The organization today urged the Turkish ambassador in Germany is to ensure for hunger strikers having access to the necessary medical treatment any time. Moreover, it should not be imposed any punitive measures against prisoners who have joined the hunger strike.



Central council for the association of Turkish doctors (TTB):

"Once again we apply on those responsible, to take responsibility. The measures of the prison governors, like for example isolation, mustn't under no circumstances be imposed to the prisoners. Before the imminent holidays healthy drinkable water, salt, sugar and the essential vitamin B1 are needed to be get and given to the prisoners urgently. It has to be made clear that in this sensitive stage inappropriate behavior can cause death!"

E. SUMMARY OF MAINSTREAM TV CHANNELS NEWS, ALJAZIRE-CNN-BBC

Al Jazeera: Kurdish hunger strikers fight for rights

Nearly 700 prisoners demanding greater recognition for Kurds in Turkey have refused food, some for nearly two months.



Kurdish hunger-striker Mazlum Dikmen's family at their home in Istanbul, Turkey [Berza Simsek/Al Jazeera]

Istanbul, Turkey - Death by starvation or long-term health damage are what Mazlum Dikmen and hundreds of other Kurdish prisoners in Turkey are now facing.

About 70 Kurdish prisoners started an indefinite hunger strike in prisons across the country on September 12. In the following weeks, more than 600 prisoners have joined them.

Their demands include increased cultural and political rights for the Kurdish community, the country's largest ethnic minority that now makes up between 15 to 20 million people in Turkey.

In their two bedroom flat in a mostly Kurdish populated shanty neighbourhood of Istanbul, the Dikmen family tell a tale that is common among the Kurdish community. Out of eight family members, two are in prison and one has fled Turkey to seek political asylum.

The father, Ahmet Dikmen, administrator of Istanbul's pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), has also been prosecuted for his political activities.

While serving strong Turkish tea in their living room, Ayhan Dikmen, the mother, says she spends her life travelling from hearing to hearing, prison to prison, in pursuit of her children.

The Dikmen's greatest worry nowadays is the welfare of their 20-year old son, Mazlum, who joined the hunger strike on October 5, in the city of Tekirdag.

Hunger striking for rights

According to figures given by the Justice Ministry, 682 prisoners in 67 prisons across the country are currently on a hunger strike. Unofficial estimates are as high as 1,000 refusing food.

They are demanding improved prison conditions, and eventual house arrest if not full release for the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, who has been in a Turkish prison on the island of Imrali in the Marmara Sea since his capture in 1999.

The prisoners also want increased cultural rights for Kurds, including education in Kurdish language and the right to defend themselves in court in their mother tongue.

As is often the case in Turkey, many Kurds can spend months, if not years, in prison awaiting trial. Mazlum, a member of the BDP who has now spent more than two years in jail, has been charged with being a member of the PKK, but has yet to be convicted and sentenced.

"The authorities cited the testimony of confidential witnesses as evidence. This means they can imprison whoever they want on these ambiguous statements. Clearly the defense mechanism in the courts isn't working," Turan Dikmen, Mazlum's eldest brother, told Al Jazeera.

After heavily armed police continuously raided and harassed the Dikmen family in their home, they decided to move for the welfare of their youngest child, five-year-old Helin Jiyan Dikmen. Ever since, she has been going through psychological therapy provided by the Human Rights Association.

The hunger strikes came 15 months after the end of these reported negotiations. Sureyya Onder, an MP from the BDP, told Al Jazeera the way to end the hunger strikes is to restart the negotiation process.

Protests across the country

The BDP has launched actions to show solidarity with the hunger strikers. Clashes erupted between the police and the protesters during demonstrations organised by the party. The families of strikers have also set up tents to share information about prisoners refusing food.

Pro-Kurdish MPs are also considering joining them. "We still pressure the government through political channels. If it doesn't work, we will also start a hunger strike," said Onder.

The fear of being imprisoned or labeled "a PKK member" is what keeps journalists away from reporting the story. As the Committee to Protect Journalists in a recent report puts it, 76 journalists, mostly Kurds, are imprisoned in Turkey because of their work.

"The Turkish public is increasingly polarised on the Kurdish issue, but the worse is around the corner," Nazan Ustundag, an associate professor at the Department of Sociology at Bogazici University, told Al Jazeera.

"The polarisation between the Kurds and pro-Kurdish democrats on one hand, and the state on the other hand will grow bigger, and the violence will increase if we witness the death of these people," she said.

Time is running out. The Turkish government said Friday that no strikers were in critical condition, but a Human Rights Association report published the same day contradicted the Justice Ministry's statement.

The report says the prisoners are taking sugared and salted water and vitamins, but their health is deteriorating. Hypotension, tachycardia, and anal and nasal bleeding have been observed among the hunger strikers.

As Turan Dikmen shows the photo of his younger brother Mazlum, he says: **"If hunger strikers start dying, no one can convince us that we can live together."**

CNN: Mass hunger strike in Turkish prisons enters 52nd day

By **Ivan Watson** and **Gul Tuysuz**, CNN

November 2, 2012 -- Updated 1855 GMT (0255 HKT)



A picture taken on November 2, 2012 shows the prison outside Ankara, where 35 Kurdish inmates are on hunger strike.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Government: There are at least 682 hunger strikers in at least 67 prisons across Turkey
- Opposition says some prisoners are in critical condition, but government disputes that
- Strikers call for use of alternate language in courts and schools, seek freedom for activist
- Turkey's prime minister has shown little sympathy for the hunger strikers

Istanbul (CNN) -- Turkey's government announced Friday that at least 682 inmates were participating in a hunger strike in at least 67 prisons across the country, but it insisted that no protesters were in critical condition.

The statement by Turkey's Justice Ministry directly contradicted reports issued by members of two opposition parties.

Dr. Aytug Atici, a medical doctor and a lawmaker from the secularist Republican People's Party, told CNN that prisoners he met during a tour of detention facilities were starting to lose basic brain functions and were showing symptoms of starvation.

"None of the people who have been on strike for 50 days, at the time when we spoke to them (Wednesday), could stand," Atici said in a phone interview with CNN. "They have begun to bleed anally and nasally. They are in critical condition."

The Justice Ministry said that government doctors were checking the health of hunger strikers daily and that they were being regularly fed rations of salt, honey, lemon, sugar and vitamins.

The maximum weight loss of protesters at one prison, the ministry reported, was 8 kilograms (about 18 pounds), though it said that it was impossible to determine weight loss with some detainees because they "refused to be weighed."

The hunger strike began more than a month ago, and has since spread throughout Turkey's penal system.

Most, if not all, of the protesters are ethnic Kurds. Their demands, according to officials from the **Peace and Democracy Party -- Turkey's largest and best-organized Kurdish nationalist party -- are**

twofold: permission to use the Kurdish language in education and in courtrooms, and an end to the solitary confinement and eventual liberation of Abdullah Ocalan.

The prison hunger strike is a phenomenon that harkens back to turbulent past decades of Turkish modern history. It was a protest measure used by leftists and communists in the 1990s and at the turn of the century that left scores of people dead.

"When we think about hunger strikes, we always think about people getting killed," said Mehmet Ali Birand, a veteran journalist and anchor on Turkish television.

"I remember at that time in 1996 and 2000, public opinion was very much against the government's handling of the situation," he added. "But this time ... public opinion is not buying it ... they are not looking favorably at the hunger strikers."

Kurds clash with Turkish police over hunger strikers

BBC 30 October 2012

Thousands of Kurdish protesters have clashed with police in Turkey on what they called a day of resistance in towns and cities across the country.

The protesters aimed to draw attention to more than 650 Kurdish prisoners who have been on a six-week hunger strike. The worst clashes were at Diyarbakir prison, in south-eastern Turkey, but they also took place in Istanbul. Tensions between the Kurds and the Turkish majority are higher now than for more than a decade, analysts say.

The hunger strikers are demanding:

- The right to use the Kurdish language in Turkey's education and legal systems
- An end to the solitary confinement of Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK

Mr Ocalan was sentenced to death in 1999, though that was later commuted to life imprisonment following the abolition of the death penalty in Turkey in 2002. The hunger strikers are refusing solid food, but allow themselves to drink water mixed with small amounts of sugar and salt. The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has blamed the PKK's leaders for the hunger strike. The Kurdish minority are thought to make up more than 20% of the population of Turkey.