

United Nations-Secretary General
Mr. António Guterres

The Makhmour Refugee Camp as a Litmus Test in the Context of Human Rights and International Law versus Interest Politics

Dear Mr. Guterres,

On the occasion of the meeting between U.S. President Biden and his Turkish counterpart Erdoğan on the sidelines of the NATO summit and the attack on the Makhmour refugee camp, the EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) held an emergency debate on 13 June 2021 entitled "US - Turkey Relations: The Makhmour Refugee Camp as a Litmus Test in the Context of Human Rights and International Law versus Interest Politics".

Relations between the two politicians seemed strained recently. Already during the election campaign, Biden announced a tougher course against Turkey and called Erdoğan an autocrat. Added to this is the recognition of the Armenian genocide by the U.S. president.

In the context of these tensions, reference was made to Turkey's invasion of the territory of the Kurdistan Regional Government - Iraq which is contrary to international law. Turkey maintains dozens of military bases there. The Makhmour refugee camp was recently also targeted by Turkish attacks. Nearly 12,000 people who were expelled from the Kurdish areas of Turkey in the 1990s live here. On 5 May 2021, a Turkish drone struck in front of a playground, killing three people. Already a year ago, 3 women were killed in a Turkish attack on the camp.

The following speakers attended the debate, which was moderated by Meghan Bodette, independent researcher focusing on Kurdish issues, USA: Nadine Maenza, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, USA - David Phillips, Director of Peace-Building and Human Rights Programme, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University, USA - Bewar Ünver, Foreign Relations Committee of Makhmour refugee Camp - Kariane Westrheim, EUTCC Chairperson, University of Bergen, Norway.

Bewar Ünver pointed out the multifaceted effects of the attacks on the camp and criticises the silence of the responsible states and institutions: "We have been attacked on a daily basis, for 4 years, by Turkish drones, targeting civilians in the camp. Psychologically, it has a very bad effect on children, women and society, as it is not known, when and where it will bomb civilians. This is a war crime by Turkey, but all sides are silent and are cooperating against us."



EU Turkey Civic Commission

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- JAMES KELMAN, Writer, UK
- JONATHAN STEELE, Veteran foreign correspondent and author, UK
- DOUG NICHOLLS, General Secretary, General Federation of Trade Unions, UK

Kariane Westrheim, who visited the camp for regarding her research three times, referred to the progressive structures in the camp and its political significance: "It is the very mindset Erdogan fear, the democratic self-governing principles that makes the Kurds independent and autonomous, that makes women consciously acting economic and political individuals on an equal footing with, and independent of men."

Nadine Maenza referred to the links between Turkey and ISIS and Turkey's attitudes towards Kurds and religious minorities especially in Northeast Syria. She also points out the contradictions of US policy: "The State Department seems keeping nation states allies heavy. So what Turkey is doing right now in Iraq and Syria against ethnic and religious minorities and local autonomist governments just does not raise to the level of lesser offenses against nation states".

David Phillips underlined the importance of coordinated international actions, addressing the US and the European institutions, against Turkey "to make them know to pay a significant prize if they ignores the international order".

Based on this, the EU Turkey Civic Commission calls upon the United Nations

- to fulfil their obligations to the Makhmour camp
- to implement their own regulations based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol for the protection of the camp
- to impose sanctions against Turkey for violating international law and committing war crimes
- to put pressure on the Kurdistan Regional Government to lift the embargo on the refugee camp

In times of the pandemic this is even more important. In this context, you have repeatedly referred to the precarious situation of refugees and the need for peaceful conflict resolution. We fully endorse these demands.

We hope that you as United Nations Secretary-General will step up your efforts to support the interests of the people in the Makhmour refugee camp and, along with it, find a political solution to the Kurdish question which is crucial for peace in the entire Middle East.

Yours respectfully,

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