

PRESS STATEMENT: LAUNCH OF THE COALITION AGAINST CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN KURDISTAN

A new initiative has been launched today to stop Turkey's illegal war in Iraqi Kurdistan and hold it to account for its alleged use of chemical weapons.

The Coalition Against Chemical Weapons in Kurdistan is backed by the British-based organisations Peace in Kurdistan, the Campaign Against Criminalising Communities and the Defend Kurdistan Initiative UK.

It is making preparations to send a delegation to Kurdistan where it plans to hold high-level meetings with officials from the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the British consulate.

A team of journalists, politicians and scientists aims to visit the areas where the alleged chemical attacks have taken place and meet with those affected. It will return with a dossier which the group will present to the United Nations in Geneva.

The Coalition Against Chemical Weapons in Kurdistan launched with a statement calling for world bodies to take action against Turkish war crimes and for the UN and Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to investigate.

The group accused Britain of complicity in the chemical attacks, claiming the the government has issued more than 70 export licences for weapons that can contain white phosphorus.

“The British government cannot remain silent as Turkey, a Nato member state, continues to rain down bombs and chemical weapons on the Kurdish people. It must immediately stop all arms sales to Turkey, in particular those that can be used in chemical attacks.

It is calling for organisations and individuals to sign its launch statement:

Turkey's Operation Claw Lightning launched on April 23 with a ground invasion and bombing of the mountainous Duhok province in Iraqi Kurdistan.

It's unseen war against the Kurdish people has continued for more than six-months to a blanket silence from the international community.

But it is accused of carrying out a litany of war crimes including air strikes on a UN-administered refugee camp, the bombing of a hospital killing eight people, including four health workers and the assassination of Yazidi commander Said Hassan in an air strike.

Turkey is a NATO ally and United Nations member state. As a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention it has declared that it does not hold a chemical stockpile.

However it is accused of using chemical weapons in its bombing of Kurdistan.

The independent Christian Peacemakers Team, which monitors the situation on the ground, believes that Turkey used white phosphorus during the artillery shelling of agricultural workers in September.

And video footage appeared to show a chemical attack on tunnels used by guerrilla fighters in May leading to calls for the establishment of commission of inquiry in the Turkish parliament

Chemical warfare is a war crime.

But to verify the use of such weapons requires the institutions responsible for investigating such attacks, including the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, to fulfil their role.

The lessons of history are clear. The world looked the other way as Saddam Hussein launched a genocide of the Kurds in the 1980s, with more than 180,000 people massacred.

In 1988 more than 5,000 men, women and children were killed in a gas attack in Halabja. We must not allow this to happen again.

Silence is complicity and a failure to act emboldens the modern day Saddam Hussein, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who continues to act with impunity.

We demand that Turkey is held to account and call on the world's media and international community to break their silence on the genocidal attacks on the Kurdish people.

The OPCW must send a team to the region immediately to investigate, and the UN and Nato must bring Turkey to heel. Act now, or you will have the blood of the Kurdish people on your hands.

To add your organisation to the list of signatories, please email:
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ENDS

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