

**INITIATIVE AGAINST
CHEMICAL WEAPONS
IN KURDISTAN**



**REPORT
DECEMBER 2021**



AN UNIGNORABLE THREAT

**Turkey`s Use of Chemical Weapons in South Kurdistan
Needs to Be Investigated**

For over seven months, the Turkish army has been carrying out relentless attacks on South Kurdistan (North Iraq) with the aim of occupying the region. Since April 23, 2021, Turkish air planes have bombed the villages, cities and rural areas thousands of times, thousands of artillery shells have hit the area, extensive ground operations have taken place and forests have been deliberately set on fire. But the single most important weapon the Turkish army has relied on during its attacks have been chemical weapons. Over three hundred chemical attacks including a wide variety of gases have been documented by the HPG (People's Defense Forces), journalists in the region and human rights organizations.¹ In a recent interview on November 26, 2021, the commander-in-chief of People's Defence Centre (HSM) Murat Karayılan gave a detailed account of the kind of chemical gases being used in the South Kurdish areas Metina, Zap and Avaşin. According to him, the Turkish army has been using five types of gasses: Tabun, Chloropicrin gas, Sulphur Mustard, a gas that causes memory loss and unconsciousness and pepper spray.² The use of tear gas in closed rooms, which is banned by international treaties, such as the guerrilla's war tunnels has officially been admitted by Turkish state officials.³ Almost 40 HPG guerrilla fighters have died and hundreds of civilians have been seriously harmed as a result of these attacks.⁴ Right after the start of its attacks on April 23, the Turkish state started using chemical weapons leading to hundreds of incidents of war crimes and the violation of international law in the course of the summer. In September, the Turkish army reportedly even escalated its chemical attacks.⁵



JUNE 14 LAUNCH OF EUROPEAN INITIATIVE 'DEFEND KURDISTAN' IN PROTEST AGAINST TURKEY'S USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Despite Turkey's strategy of carrying out war crimes and deliberately breaking international law in order to crush the guerrilla's resistance and forcibly depopulate the civilian population of South Kurdistan, the international community and international organizations, especially the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the United Nations (UN) the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), have so far ignored the many calls on them to investigate Turkey's use of chemical weapons. This has allowed the Turkish state to unabatingly carry out war crimes in South Kurdistan.

But it is still not too late. If the international community and the responsible international institutions decide to act now and start investigations immediately, the Turkish state will be

1 <https://anfenglish.com/kurdistan/hpg-releases-six-month-balance-sheet-of-war-in-south-kurdistan-55756>

2 <https://medyanews.net/pkk-s-top-executive-member-karayilan-announces-the-chemical-gasses-used-against-them/>; Murat Karayılan's full statement on the types of gasses that have been used: „One of them is nerve gas. In other words, it freezes the nerve cells of the human being, causing it to remain immobile and causing the death of the person in a short time. The main substance of this gas is called Tabun. When this weapon is used, most of it smells of fruit, but sometimes there is also no smell. The second weapon they use is for suffocating the human. This weapon contains Chloropicrin gas. This gas is also called Green Cross. The Germans first developed this formulation during World War I. It has been in the hands of the Turks since then. Maybe now the Turks are producing it on their own, but of course, there's a possibility that they're doing it with the Germans. The main origin of this weapon is in Germany. This weapon suffocates people in the region where it is used. The other gas is a burning gas. This gas burns and dries you. Wherever you throw it, there's fire. Its chemical name is Sulphur Mustard. This is also originally from Germany and called Yellow Cross. This also takes on a yellow colour when used. However, it burns every area in which it is used. Another gas they use against us makes one sluggish, causes memory loss and people pass out. The person who has been exposed to this gas loses all power and has periodic paralysis. As in the case of Eagle Hill, they have used this gas in many places. The fifth is Pepper spray. So it's the gases they use against the people in protests right now. Of course, when used in a narrow space or a tunnel, the person has no opportunity to escape there. So this is a lethal gas too.”

3 <https://medyanews.net/chemical-weapons-practice-of-turkish-state-from-kazan-valley-to-mount-gare/>

4 <https://cptik.org/reports-1/2021/8/23/updates-on-turkish-military-operation-claw-lightning>

5 <https://anfdeutsch.com/kurdistan/neue-chemiewaffe-deutlich-starker-als-bisher-verwendete-waffen-28716>

effectively pressured to refrain from using chemical weapons and those responsible will be held accountable. This will not only directly save many human lives in South Kurdistan but also prevent Turkey and other state and non-state actors from using banned chemical weapons in other conflicts in the future. Now is the time for the OPCW, UN, ICRC, international governments and all members of the international community to act against this unignorable threat: Turkey's continuing use of chemical weapons in South Kurdistan.

1. Broad International Efforts to Urge Investigation of Chemical Weapons Attacks

Continuous and broad efforts by journalists, researchers, MPs and civil organizations from all over the world after the start of Turkey's attacks on April 23 very quickly provided all necessary information to the responsible international institutions and organizations. As part of these efforts repeated calls were made for international investigations into the use of chemical weapons by Turkey. These calls were openly supported by the HPG and the KCK (Kurdistan Democratic Communities Union) which both invited international organizations to carry out investigations in South Kurdistan and offered their assistance for such efforts in areas controlled by the guerrilla. This includes calls by HSM commander-in-chief Murat Karayılan on October 20⁶, HPG commander Dr. Bager Baran on November 1⁷ and the KCK on November 5. In its statement, the KCK directly addressed the OPCW: "We call on you to live up to your tasks, investigate the use of chemical weapons by the Turkish occupation forces in the guerrilla areas of South Kurdistan as soon as possible and without further passing of valuable time and to thus stop this crime. We would like to emphasize here that we are ready to provide all necessary support and assistance for these efforts."⁸

On May 27, 2021, the HDP member of the Turkish parliament Nuran İmir raised a parliamentary motion addressing the use of chemical weapons by the Turkish army in South Kurdistan and called for a special commission of inquiry in the Turkish Parliament.⁹ She referred to reports by the British newspaper Morning Star that included videos of members of the HPG guerrilla who had been killed with chemical weapons shortly after the start of the Turkish attacks on April 23.



JUNE 25

13 BRITISH TRADE UNIONS CONDEMN TURKEY'S USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

On June 9, 2021, the Swedish MP in the European Parliament (EP), Malin Björk (The Left), directed a parliamentary question at the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Under the title „Turkey's invasion and chemical attacks in northern Iraq“, he asked for more information on the matter and demanded a condemnation of Turkey's use of chemical weapons.¹⁰ Despite earlier reports in the international media including video footage of HPG guerrilla members who had been killed with chemical weapons¹¹, the EU High Representative/ Vice-President Josep Borrell dismissed the serious accusations and simply stated: „No reports

6 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/features/karayilan-calls-for-on-site-investigation-into-turkish-chemical-attacks-55673>

7 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/hpg-commander-baran-calls-on-international-bodies-to-investigate-chemical-weapons-used-by-turkey-55923>

8 <https://kck-info.com/statement-nov0521/>

9 <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/star-report-chemical-weapons-attack-kurds-leads-calls-turkish-parliamentary>

10 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-003063_EN.html

11 <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/turkish-chemical-weapons-attack-leaked-to-star-amid-calls-for-independent-investigations>; <https://www.jungewelt.de/loginFailed.php?ref=/artikel/402597.neoosmanische-expansionspolitik-giftgas-gegen-kurden.html>; <https://www.jungewelt.de/loginFailed.php?ref=/artikel/403459.t%C3%BCrkischer-expansionskrieg-wieder-giftgas-gegen-kurden.html>

of confirmed chemical attacks have, however, been presented.”¹²

On June 14, 2021, almost 150 politicians, human rights advocates, journalists, academics, MPs, political activists, ecologists, and feminists from different European countries announced the start of the initiative ‘Defend Kurdistan’ during a press conference in the South Kurdish city of Erbil. In its founding statement, the initiative accused the Turkish state of breaking international law and violating human rights conventions.¹³ Although the members of the initiative wanted to travel to the areas affected by Turkey’s attacks with chemical weapons to investigate the devastating effects on the civilian population, security forces of the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) hindered them from doing so thus effectively imposing a media and travel ban on dozens of villages in South Kurdistan.

In a letter to the Turkish ambassador to the UK on June 25, 2021, the presidents of thirteen British trade unions expressed their shock at the reports of Turkey’s use of chemical weapons in South Kurdistan and called for an immediate stop of the Turkish attacks.¹⁴



AUGUST 14 THOUSANDS PROTEST IN GERMANY AGAINST TURKEY’S USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN SOUTH KURDISTAN

On August 14, in the German city of Düsseldorf thousands protested against the war crimes committed by Turkey in South Kurdistan. The initiative ‘Defend Kurdistan’ had called for the protests in order to stop Turkey’s war crimes and violations of international law.¹⁵

Hundreds of people demonstrated in front of the UN in Geneva and the OPCW in The Hague on October 6, 2021. The demonstrators condemned the silence of both institutions and the international community and urged them to investigate Turkey’s use of chemical weapons and to take immediate actions in order to prevent further war crimes.¹⁶

On October 15, 2021, the MP of the German Bundestag, Gökhay Akbulut (Die Linke), submitted a parliamentary question regarding the war crimes committed by Turkey in South Kurdistan. She indicated that the German Government had knowledge concerning the use of chemical weapons and asked whether the government also had any information on how Turkey could have been provided with such weapons.¹⁷

Andrew Feinstein, an internationally renowned weapons expert and the director of Shadow World Investigations, called the reports on the use of chemical weapons by Turkey credible in an interview on October 17, 2021 and accused the country of having violated OPCW agreements several times in the past: “Turkey has been seen over a number of years to violate a whole range of international agreements. It of course is a member of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. But this is not new for Turkey to be a member of an international body and then to violate the very agreements that govern that international body. [...] The time has now come for these international bodies, for the international community to

¹² https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-003063-ASW_EN.html

¹³ <https://defend-kurdistan.com/declaration/>

¹⁴ <https://anfdeutsch.com/aktuelles/britische-gewerkschaften-schreiben-an-turkischen-botschafter-26958>

¹⁵ <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/defend-kurdistan-demonstration-in-dusseldorf-54164>

¹⁶ <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/demonstrations-say-turkeys-use-chemical-weapons-kurds-are-war-crime-they-demand-action>

¹⁷ <https://goekay-akbulut.de/2021/10/15/was-weiss-die-bundesregierung-ueber-tuerkische-chemiewaffen/>

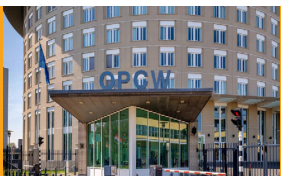
start calling out Turkey, to take diplomatic action against Turkey when it violates international agreements, when it commits war crimes.”¹⁸

In a joint open letter on October 21, 2021, over 100 MPs, journalists, intellectuals, women’s rights activists, human rights activists and civil society members from South Kurdistan called for immediate investigations by the Secretary General of the United Nations, António Guterres, members of the Executive Council of OPCW and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs. In their letter, they demanded an independent commission to investigate the use of chemical weapons by Turkey on the ground stating that „We believe that conducting such an investigation is not only your legal and institutional obligation, but also a moral and human duty“.¹⁹

On the same day, the Italian MP Erasmo Palazzotto submitted a parliamentary question to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation regarding the use of chemical weapons by Turkey. He accused Turkey of repeated violations of international conventions and concluded that chemical weapons had been used extensively in the South Kurdish areas Metina, Zap, and Avaşin since April 23, 2021.²⁰

Forty-four Arab intellectuals from Iraq published an open letter to the OPCW on October 22, 2021. In their letter, they demanded immediate field investigations in the South Kurdish areas affected by the use of chemical weapons by the Turkish state. They also drew attention to the similarity between the crimes committed by the regime of Saddam Hussein and that of Turkey today: “The Turkish army perpetrates the same crimes committed by Saddam Hussein against the Kurdish people by deploying chemical weapons.”²¹

Sixty-five women and women’s organizations from all over the world, including Silvia Federici (Professor Emerita of Political Philosophy and International Studies, Hofstra University, USA), Selay Ghaffar (Spokeswoman of Solidarity Party of Afghanistan, Afghanistan) and Helda Khasmy (Chairwoman of SERUNI, Indonesia), joined the efforts on October 22, 2021 with an open letter to OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias: „We expect you, as the Director-General of an international organization for the prohibition of chemical weapons, to fulfill your responsibility, to investigate these serious allegations, to take clarifying action and to hold Turkey accountable for its crimes.”²²



OCTOBER 06

HUGE PROTESTS IN FRONT OF UN AND OPCW OFFICES CALLING FOR IMMEDIATE INVESTIGATIONS INTO TURKEY’S USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Fifty-one Kurdish organizations and political parties in Europe sent an open letter on October 27, 2021 to the Executive Committee of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the OPCW. In their letter, they warned that the banning of „independent inspections from the conflict area is raising serious concerns“ and addressed the OPCW directly: „We know that you, OPCW, are the institution that needs to take the most urgent action on the use

¹⁸ <https://medyanews.net/andrew-feinstein-from-shadow-world-investigations-we-all-have-to-stand-up-for-turkeys-war-crimes/>

¹⁹ <https://anfenglishmobile.com/features/joint-appeal-for-international-investigation-into-turkey-s-use-of-chemical-weapons-55689>

²⁰ <https://anfenglish.com/news/turkey-s-use-of-chemical-weapons-brought-up-in-the-italian-parliament-55700>

²¹ <https://medyanews.net/arab-intellectuals-urge-opcw-to-investigate-turkeys-alleged-use-of-chemicals-against-kurdish-fighters/>

²² <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/65-women-write-to-opcw-to-investigate-claims-of-turkish-use-of-chemical-weapons-55706>

of chemical weapons. In the silence of the international community, your attitude affects us the most.“ Consequently, the organizations and parties, which include the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), the GORRAN movement and Kongra Star (Women’s Organization of Western, Northeastern Syria) Europe, asked for immediate actions to prevent the use of chemical weapons by Turkey.²³

On October 28, 2021, the HDP MP Feleknas Uca raised the issue of Turkey’s use of chemical weapons in the Turkish parliament. She submitted parliamentary questions aimed at clarifying the use of chemical weapons and at identifying those responsible for this war crime.²⁴



OCTOBER 21

OVER 100 MPs, INTELLECTUALS, WOMEN’S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS ETC. FROM SOUTH KURDISTAN CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATIONS

On November 3, 2021, the Kurdish Friendship Group in the European Parliament also called for investigations into Turkey’s use of chemical weapons in South Kurdistan. It warned that “Without a vigorous and urgent intervention, Turkey would be encouraged in its practices that endanger peace in this part of the world” and called on international institutions and organizations to “act quickly and send a delegation to investigate”.²⁵

Over sixty prominent lawyers, writers, trade unionists, rights activists, academics and community workers mostly from the United Kingdom launched a new Coalition Against Chemical Weapons in Kurdistan on November 26, 2021. The declared purpose of the coalition is to “demand action on the alleged use of chemical weapons by Turkey against the Kurds is its latest military operation into Northern Iraq (South Kurdistan)“. The members include Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (Green Party Member of the House of Lords), Chris Stephens (MP, Glasgow South West), Doug Nicholls, (General Secretary, General Federation of Trade Unions) and Dr. Thomas Jeffrey Miley (University of Cambridge).²⁶

2. Ongoing International Silence and Active Obstruction of Investigations

As can be seen above, a huge number of organizations, parties, institutions, politicians, professors and human rights activists from all over the world have made great efforts in the past seven months to achieve on-the-ground investigations in South Kurdistan and to eventually stop of the use of chemical weapons by Turkey. Yet, the deafening silence of both international and regional governments, but also international institutions and organizations such as the UN and OPCW continues. The determined efforts to shed light on Turkey’s war crimes and violations of international law in South Kurdistan have so far led to only vague official answers. This dangerous silence towards the serious crimes committed by Turkey only encourages Turkey and potentially even more state and non-state actors to consider the use of chemical weapons as a means of warfare that does not entail any serious consequences for the perpetrators of this war crime.

In its response to a parliamentary question submitted by the Bundestag MP Gökhay Akbulut on October 15, 2021, the German federal government refused to give a clear answer simply stat-

²³ <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/letter-calls-for-unoda-and-opcw-action-against-turkish-use-of-chemical-weapons-55817>

²⁴ <https://www.hawarnews.com/tr/haber/feleknas-ucadan-tbmmye-kimyasal-iddialarini-netlestirin-h47444.html>

²⁵ <https://esta.krd/en/106002/>

²⁶ <https://www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/press-release-new-coalition-against-chemical-weapons-in-kurdistan-launches-demand-for-investigation-into-turkeys-alleged-use-of-chemical-weapons-against-the-kurds/>

ing that apart from media coverage it did not know of any information on the use of chemical weapons by Turkey in South Kurdistan. In its official answer, the German government referred to the OPCW as the responsible institution for investigating these accusations. Yet, the OPCW has so far refused to make a single official comment on the matter. Despite dozens of calls, letters and huge protests in front of the OPCW in The Hague, OPCW officials have yet to live up to their responsibility and start investigations into Turkey's use of chemical weapons since the start of its attacks on South Kurdistan on April 23, 2021. If they and other international institutions such as the UN continue their silence, they will become directly complicit in the Turkish war crimes and thus lose all their credibility and trust that they have so far enjoyed among the Kurdish people and the international public. Even the KDP-led Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi government have not made any efforts to investigate and stop the use of chemical weapons within their own borders. The many calls by South Kurdish, Iraqi and international voices have not been answered by either KDP officials or state representatives in Baghdad. In addition, a number of international delegations that had recently planned to travel to the affected areas in South Kurdistan were unfortunately obstructed by the KDP thus being unable to conduct investigations in the villages and rural areas. This clearly supports the concerns about a secret deal between Erbil, Baghdad and Ankara in which all three governments have apparently agreed on ignoring all the war crimes and violations of international law that are being carried out in the attacks on the guerrilla forces and the civilian population of South Kurdistan. Current efforts by Kurdish institutions and laboratories in Europe to examine soil samples from the South Kurdish areas Metina, Zap, and Avaşin where attacks with chemical weapons took place are apparently being deliberately obstructed due to pressure of certain European states. Thus, calls for investigations and pressure on the Turkish state are not only being ignored internationally and regionally, but even efforts by various organizations and laboratories in Europe are being actively sabotaged. This dangerous policy makes certain European states directly complicit in the war crimes and violations of international law carried out by Turkey and raises serious questions concerning the willingness of the responsible international bodies such as the OPCW and UN to live up to their task of preventing war crimes such as the use of chemical weapons.



OCTOBER 22

44 ARAB INTELLECTUALS FROM IRAQ CALL ON OPCW TO IMMEDIATELY CONDUCT INVESTIGATIONS IN SOUTH KURDISTAN

3. Turkey's Use of Chemical Weapons Remains a Threat

Latest reports from the South Kurdish areas Metina, Zap, and Avaşin show that the matter of international investigations has become even more urgent. On November 8, 2021, the journalist Kawa Tolhildan, who has been following the Turkish attacks on the ground since April 23, reported that recently the Turkish army had started to deliberately destroy traces of its use of chemical weapons. Especially in the areas Zendûra, Werxelê, Mamreşo, Girê Sor and Girê Kartal the Turkish army has started to destroy the war tunnels that had been used by the guerrilla in the area. Apparently, a special substance is also being used that destroys the traces of chemical weapons.²⁷ If international delegations don't visit the affected areas soon, the Turkish state will be allowed to continue its attempts of covering up the war crimes and violations of international law it has committed in South Kurdistan since April 23, 2021.

Allowing the Turkish state to cover up its crimes and continue to use chemical weapons would

27 <https://rojnews.news/ku/kurdistan/rojnamevan-tolhildan-dewleta-tirk-hewl-dide-sopen-kimyabarane-ji-hole-rake/>

entail devastating consequences on a global scale thus putting the whole international community at great risk. In the course of the last decade, the Turkish state has turned into a destabilizing force not only in the Middle East, but also in the Mediterranean, the Caucasus and the Balkans. It has sent thousands of soldiers, tens of thousand Islamist proxy forces and drones to Libya and Azerbaijan, deployed war ships against NATO partners like Greece, France, Germany and the UK in the Eastern Mediterranean, occupied huge swaths of land in Syria and Iraq and deliberately stirred up religious and ethnic tensions in the Balkan region. State representatives, including Erdogan himself and ministers like Hulusi Akar, have stated repeatedly that they consider it the right of Turkey to invade neighboring countries, carry out demographic change and effectively annex territory. The fact that the Turkish army has established a number of new military outposts in South Kurdistan since the start of its attacks on April 23 also indicates that it is planning to stay in the area and even expand its attacks in the spring of 2022. In this context, it would be fatal to ignore Turkey's use of chemical weapons and not to carry out immediate investigations into the matter. This would only allow Turkey to cover up the traces and thus encourage it to not only continue using these banned weapons but even make use of them in the many other conflicts it is involved in. This could be interpreted by other states and also non-state actors as a green light to use chemical weapons thus tremendously escalating the scale of violence in the Middle East and other parts of the world. Therefore, immediate investigations into Turkey's use of chemical weapons in South Kurdistan will not only serve to prevent further harm in the region itself, but will also show all potential perpetrators of this war crime that the international community is serious about protecting humanity from the use of weapons of mass destruction such as chemical weapons.

**OCTOBER 22****65 WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR INVESTIGATIONS IN
OPEN LETTER TO OPCW DIRECTOR-GENERAL FERNANDO ARIAS**

4. Urgent Call for International Investigations

In light of the extensive use of chemical weapons by Turkey since the start of its attacks on South Kurdistan on April 23, 2021 and due to the deafening silence of international governments, organizations and institutions, especially the OPCW, UN and WHO, we urge all responsible actors to live up to their task of protecting the Kurds, the peoples of the Middle East and humanity from the devastating effects of chemical weapons. The most urgent and immediate step is to bring an end to Turkey's use of these weapons of mass destruction. Especially the upcoming 26th Session of the Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW from November 29 to December 3 will give the international community the opportunity to act swiftly.

We therefore call on all international governments, institutions and organizations, especially the OPCW, UN, WHO and the ICRC,...

...to put Turkey's use of chemical weapons on the agenda of the 26th Session of the Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW from November 29 to December 3.

...to ask the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) to provide the soil samples it has received from the areas Metina, Zap, and Avaşin where chemical weapons have been used by the Turkish state, to examine them for traces of these banned weapons and to share the results with the international public as soon as possible.

...to send international delegations to the South Kurdish areas Metina, Zap, and Avaşin and carry out independent investigations there into the use of chemical weapons by the Turkish state.

We also call on the KDP and the Iraqi government to break their silence on Turkey's use of chemical weapons, immediately respond to the calls for investigations into the matter and open the way for international delegations which want to investigate the affected areas.



NOVEMBER 26

**OVER 60 PROMINENT LAWYERS, WRITERS, TRADE UNIONISTS ETC. FROM UK
LAUNCH THE 'COALITION AGAINST CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN KURDISTAN'**

