*“Freedom shall prevail; Take action for Abdullah Öcalan."*

PEACE IN KURDISTAN

**FREEDOM FOR ABDULLAH OCALAN**

*Statement on 15 December 2021*

Abdullah Ocalan was expelled from Syria in October 1998 and imprisoned on Imrali Island in the Sea of Marmara by the Turkish state in February 1999. Abdullah Ocalan is the leader of the Kurdish people and of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). For most of the 22 years of his imprisonment, Ocalan has been held in isolation and he has been denied visits from his family and legal representatives. The conditions of Abdullah Ocalan’s confinement breach both Turkish and international law.

Ocalan’s capture, imprisonment and treatment were and are intended to break the Kurdish people’s struggle for rights and recognition. As Ocalan himself has explained, the denial of the Kurdish people’s rights and their subordination to the interests governing the regional states has been integral to sustaining the post-World War One status quo in the Middle East. Ocalan’s imprisonment and isolation is inextricably linked to the suffering of the peoples of this region.

In defiance of their wishes, the Kurdish people and their lands were divided up by the British and the French governments; first by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and then formally with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian and Iranian states were founded on this oppression of the Kurds. There can be no progress towards democracy in any one of these four states without a resolution of the Kurdish question which realises the Kurdish aspiration to democracy and representation. Every manifestation of the Kurdish people’s desire for recognition and representation is treated as a threat by the governing powers of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran and for over a century has been ruthlessly suppressed. Abdullah Ocalan symbolises and demonstrates the Kurdish people’s determination to end their oppression. That is the true reason why he has been imprisoned for 22 years.

The consequences of the Turkish government’s imprisonment of Abdullah Ocalan infiltrates every corner of Turkish society. From the attempted criminalisation of the People’s Democratic Party (HDP), the imprisoning of its leaders and MPs, the forced removal and gaoling of elected mayors and officials, the closing down of the media and imprisoning of journalists, the intimidation of charities and civil society organisations, the removal of civil servants, other government employees and members of the judiciary from their posts – in fact, the growing edifice of dictatorship and repression has as its fulcrum the imprisonment of Abdullah Ocalan. The wars waged by Turkey in Iraq, Syria and the Kurdish regions of Turkey, the depopulation programme that has resulted in refugees drowning in the English Channel – all pivot on the continuing imprisonment of Abdullah Ocalan. Ocalan’s treatment directly expresses the Turkish government’s ruthless determination to crush the Kurdish people’s resistance by force.

From prison, Abdullah Ocalan has repeatedly attempted to steer his captors, and their backers, towards a peaceful solution to the conflicts in Turkey and across the region. His efforts have been rejected. Ocalan has shown that he is ready to negotiate with the Turkish government for a resolution to the conflict and for peace. He has previously shown good will and directed the PKK to order ceasefires, which it has successfully enforced on the Kurdish forces. His illegal and brutal treatment is the only answer that he and the Kurds have received. It is essential that Abdullah Ocalan is freed and able to participate in talks to comprehensively resolve the conflicts that are raging in the region claiming more casualties by the day.

While in prison Abdullah Ocalan has studied and written about history, society and morality and the lessons to be learned. His and the PKK’s positions have evolved considerably. His writings bear careful scrutiny and study. He has received academic acclaim for the thoroughness and insightfulness of his work. Ocalan’s thoughts emerge from practical issues that must be confronted. His books are a work in progress that we want to see continued. Critically, Ocalan has analysed the role of the state in society and the oppression of women. His conclusions have practical effects in the conduct of the Kurdish struggle and the organisation of Rojava society. Democratic Confederalism, with genuine mass participation in decision making, overcoming the exclusionary division of labour that has marked out previous societies, for example in capitalist modernity, is essential. The self-emancipation of women is central and critical to any move towards democracy and human freedom. As a result of his reflections on the 20th century struggles for socialism, Ocalan has been instrumental in fashioning a movement that combats patriarchy and sectarianism and puts ecology at its core. What he calls for is both a material and moral transformation of society – a change in the ideas that have governed society for the past 5,000 years and more.

These ideas have been developed in isolation in a prison cell in Turkey in the Middle East. These are lands with peoples that have endured generations of ethnic and religious bigotry, brutal patriarchy, and war. This suffering must end. The time has come: Freedom for Abdullah Ocalan.

**Peace in Kurdistan**

*Campaign for a political solution of the Kurdish Question*

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