



International Initiative

"Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan"

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Press statement

From İmralı to Afrin

Statement the 19th anniversary of Abdullah Öcalan's abduction

15 February 2018 marks the 19th anniversary of Abdullah Öcalan's abduction from Nairobi, Kenya in 1999. The outrage over the coordinated action by multiple states in abducting and handing Öcalan over to Turkey, where he would be given the death penalty, resulted in the founding of the International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan" in March 1999.

İmralı

In 2002, the Turkish state abolished the death penalty as a result of international pressure and the protests of Kurds and human rights organisations worldwide. However, at present there are discussions with a view to possibly reintroducing it. Nevertheless, Abdullah Öcalan is living under conditions that are likened to those on death row. He is held incommunicado in İmralı Island prison, located off Istanbul in the Marmara Sea, between the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles: which means no visits, no letters and no phone calls. He has been isolated from the outside world for almost three years now—with only one brief interruption over this period of a visit for just 30 minutes.

It needs to be stressed that it not Turkey alone that is held responsible for Öcalan's conditions and the blatant violations of his inalienable human rights. The European Court of Human Rights and the European Anti-Torture Committee (CPT) have both woefully failed to apply sufficient pressure and sanctions to bring an end to the isolation. No state has publicly criticised the İmralı prison system, and NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have remained completely silent with regard to Öcalan's situation.

Afrin

Since 20 January 2018, NATO member Turkey, in alliance with its jihadists mercenaries, has been flagrantly trampling over international law and trying to invade the predominantly Kurdish Canton of Afrin in North Syria, indiscriminately massacring local defence forces and civilians alike during this unprovoked attack. So 19 years after Öcalan's abduction, once again international actors keep silent with regard to Turkey's attempt to occupy Afrin. While Russia actively permits this attempted invasion, NATO states remain quiescent to Turkey's attacks and the widely documented violations of international law and human rights in Afrin. The difference between Öcalan's abduction and the Afrin invasion, both involving the cooperation of states other than Turkey - is

First Signatories of the International Initiative

Mairead Corrigan-Maguire (Nobel Peace Prize, Ireland), **Dario Fo** (Nobel Prize in Literature, Italy), **Adolfo Perez Esquivel** (Nobel Peace Prize, Argentina), **José Ramos-Horta** (Nobel Peace Prize, East Timor), **José Saramago** (Nobel Prize in Literature, Portugal), **Danielle Mitterrand** (Foundation France Liberté, France), **Ramsey Clark** (form. Attorney General, USA), **Uri Avnery** (Gush Shalom, Israel), **Noam Chomsky** (Linguist, Publicist, MIT, USA), **Alain Lipietz** (MEP, France), **Pedro Marset Campos** (MEP, Spain), **Lord Eric Avebury** (House of Lords, UK), **Harry Cohen** (MP Labour, UK), **Cynog Dafis** (MP Plaid Cymru, Wales, UK), **Lord Raymond Hylton** (House of Lords, UK), **Lord John Nicholas Rea** (House of Lords, UK), **Walid Jumblatt** (Leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, Lebanon), **Rudi Vis** (MP Labour, UK), **Paul Flynn** (MP Labour, UK), **Máiréad Keane** (Sinn Féin, Northern Ireland), **Domenico Gallo** (form. Senator, Italy), **Livio Pepino** (Magistratura Democratica, Italien), **Xabier Arzalluz** (President PNV, Spain), **Tony Benn** (MP Labour, UK), **Alain Calles** (President MRAP, France), **Gianna Nannini** (Singer-songwriter, Italy), **Geraldine Chaplin** (Actress, Spain), **David MacDowall** (Writer, UK), **Dieterich Kittner** (Cabaret artist, Germany), **Alice Walker** (Writer, USA), **Franca Rame** (Writer and actress, Italy), **Chris Kutschera** (Writer, France), **Prof. Dr. Jean Ziegler** (MP and Publicist, Switzerland), **Prof. Dr. Angela Davis** (University of California, Santa Cruz, USA), **Prof. Dr. Norman Paech** (International Law, Germany), **Prof. Dr. Werner Ruf** (International Law, Germany), **Prof. Dr. Gerhard Stuby** (International Law, Germany), **Hans Branscheidt** (medico international, Germany)

the fact that due to the struggles of Kurdish people, their political leaders and their allies the attacks on Afrin do not go unnoticed and are heavily criticised by public opinion.

An inspiration for freedom struggles

Öcalan is one of the most popular political leaders in the Middle East, with supporters among the Arab and Turkish populations, as well as Kurdish people inside and outside Turkey. His strength is that he not only articulates and identifies wide-reaching problems such as gender inequality, environmental destruction, capitalist exploitation and state repression, but he also explains ways in which these great problems can be overcome through the struggle of oppressed peoples here and now. Despite the fact that he is isolated and in prison, his ideas and his resilience remain an inspiration. Moreover, on many occasions Öcalan has shown the capacity to begin and develop a peace process from within the prison walls and to exert influence on the Turkish state, the PKK and the people of Turkey. During the peace talks held between 2013 and 2015, his influence contributed immensely to the advance of democracy in Turkey. When the talks were unilaterally brought to a halt by the Turkish state, the conflicts escalated once again, state repression intensified, and many people lost their hopes for a safe and democratic future. Just as the late Nelson Mandela once did in South Africa, Abdullah Öcalan is the individual who can reverse the tide of oppression against his people once again.

Öcalan's influence reaches far beyond Turkey's borders. His voluminous prison writings have been translated into 20 languages and are read throughout the world – especially in the Middle East, where his ideas have the greatest tangible impact. In Rojava (Northern Syria) people inspired by his prison writings are building a multi-ethnic, multi-religious democratic self-administration that has become a beacon of hope in a region so often portrayed as hopelessly entangled in nationalism and sectarian violence. In contrast to the propaganda of international state elites, in Rojava Arabs, Yezidis, Assyrians and women regard his ideas and project as addressed to themselves and not only to Kurdish people and their sovereignty, but they recognise that his ideas are part of a democratic program for the emancipation of all oppressed people in the war-stricken regions of the Middle East.

As a result of the revolution in North Syria and its widespread appeal to different people and communities and due to his popularity during the period of peace in Turkey between 2013 and 2015, Abdullah Öcalan's ideas – from self-administration and democratic confederalism to the women's revolution – are more visible now than ever before. This reality only reinforces and strengthens our belief in what we stated in our founding statement nineteen years ago: *"It seems reasonable to assume that the solution of the Kurdish question in Turkey will be closely linked to his fate in the future."*

This is even more true today. The only possible solution to the decades-old conflict in Turkey is a political solution through negotiations, and it is Abdullah Öcalan who can once again bring forth a peace process. This is why we connect the two demands: "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan". You can't have one without the other. Öcalan's freedom must come to the top of the international and local agenda so that peace and democracy can finally come to Turkey. The time has come!

We must begin by fighting to open a crack in the walls that are currently isolating Abdullah Öcalan and his fellow prisoners on İmralı Island. Their total isolation symbolise Turkey's approach to democracy and peoples' rights. Towards the goal of directing attention to Öcalan, his ideas, accomplishments and the human rights violations he systematically encounters, the anniversary of his illegal abduction, as in every year since 1999, will be marked with demonstrations around the world.

Kurdish mass protests in 1999 ended the death penalty. Mass demonstrations supported the defenders of Kobanê in 2014 and helped turn the tide in their favour. Today we need international mass protests for an end of the Turkish invasion in Afrin and for Öcalan's freedom. The time has come! Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan, Peace in Kurdistan! Now!