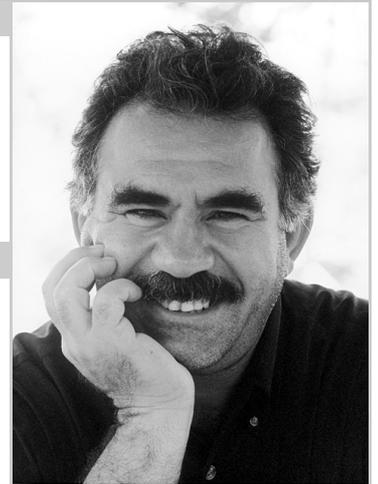


Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan

Who is Abdullah Öcalan?

Millions of Kurds regard Abdullah Öcalan as their political spokesman and leader. In a 2006 petition campaign the signatures of roughly 3.5 million Kurds testified this fact. Their most important advocate in their fight for cultural rights and democracy, he is widely regarded as a symbol of Kurdish freedom. He rejects Kurdish separatism and secessionism and advances as a solution a democratic Middle East with equal rights for all peoples.



Tireless efforts for peace

Since 1993 Öcalan has been trying, by the use of ceasefires, to bring about conditions favourable to a peaceful political solution for the Kurdish question. Even after his illegal abduction, Öcalan continued to champion such a solution. In 1999, responding to his call, Kurdish guerrillas withdrew from Turkish territory, then maintained a ceasefire until 2005. In October 2006 the guerrillas again heeded his call for a unilateral ceasefire.

Isolation on the Prison Island Imrali: Europe's Guantanamo

Since 1999 Turkey has illegally detained her most prominent prisoner in solitary confinement. Öcalan is the only prisoner in the entire island fortress, permitted to have no contact with other living beings. Even plants are forbidden. The government has amended numerous laws especially for his case, abolished laws that might have protected him, and introduced special punishments. Imrali is a "legal blackhole", a juridical no-man's-land under the control not of the judiciary but of the military.

Death penalty through the back-door: Isolate first, then kill

In March 2007, Öcalan's lawyers presented laboratory findings clearly indicating that he has been subjected to heavy metal poisoning. Ever since then millions of Kurds have protested in fear for his life – and the peace process has all but ceased. The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited the island prison Imrali, confirmed the exceptional high metal levels but could not determine their origin. In October 2008 the repression reached a new level. Öcalan was physically attacked for the first time and even received death threats from prison personnel. This sparked widespread protests all over Kurdistan, Turkey and Europe. While Öcalan is isolated, his life is in constant danger.

Escalating violence

Meanwhile the Turkish government is responsible for the most intensive military operation in years – however without success. The Turkish army's intensive domestic and cross-border operations have resulted in many casualties on both sides. Öcalan has been warning against such an escalation for years and trying to prevent it. The powers-that-be in Turkey have ignored his calls for a bilateral ceasefire but are instead trying to liquidate him and to continue their repressive policies. Europe sits and watches and thereby supports the Turkish politics of violence.

Why are we here?

We want peace and a democratic solution in Kurdistan and Turkey. We believe that Öcalan, with his concept of a democratic republic, is the guarantor of such a solution. The inhumane isolation with which he is being tortured must be abandoned, all threats to his life must be stopped. We fear for his life.

Therefore:

- The isolation must be ended, and Imrali closed down.
- The armed conflict must be stopped immediately.
- A political dialogue must be initiated to solve the Kurdish question.
- Dialogue instead of violence: Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan!



Peace in Kurdistan

International Initiative „Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan“

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Background Information

The unsolved Kurdish Question

In Turkey, Syria, and Iran the Kurdish people remain deprived of their most elementary human rights. The violent suppression of all their political demands has led to the emergence of armed resistance throughout Kurdistan. Today the conflict between the Kurdish guerilla force and the Turkish army is at a stalemate. Nor have efforts to reach a political solution in Turkey, where most Kurds live, led to a breakthrough.

Europe: A wall of silence

Despite Turkey's accession talks with the European Union, the EU has obviously written off the Kurds. Not for years have Europe offered even the slightest trace of a concept of how to solve the Kurdish-Turkish question. The Kurdish side, which has proposed viable solutions several times, is being excluded systematically, its representatives declared *persona non grata*, and thus a whole population humiliated. Yet the Kurdish demands are neither excessive nor exaggerated. They demand full recognition for Kurds as citizens of their respective states with full cultural and political rights – actually the most natural thing in the world.

Human Rights in free fall

Since 9/11 the debate over terrorism in Europe has led to a dangerous diminution of human rights. Even the prohibition of torture is no longer considered universally valid – exceptions are becoming the rule. In the case of Ocalan this means: his imprisonment conditions, which are incompatible with human rights, are sometimes criticised mildly but in the end are politically accepted. Even clear violations of the European Human Rights Convention are tacitly accepted – in any case the leading European states will not intervene against it. Thus Europe and especially the Council of Europe, which is expected to be the watchdog for human rights on the continent, is very vocal in criticizing the United States for CIA abductions, torture, and special prisons. But they ignore the special prison Imrali – whose inmate was likewise abducted by the CIA and has been exposed to isolation-torture ever since – because it is situated in Europe. Three months after laboratory results were published, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) pulled itself together and visited the island. Ten months later

they slammed the Turkish government for the isolation. The only consequence: Even more psychological and physical abuse.

Imrali: Europe's Guantanamo

Since 1999 Turkey has incarcerated its most prominent prisoner in illegal isolation. Numerous laws have been changed only for his case. For example, all his conversations with his legal team are tape-recorded by an official present in the room, which has lately even been legalized. His right to legal defence counsel is thus suspended completely. Most of the time the lawyers' visits are prevented under arbitrary pretexts. He receives no adequate medical treatment for his numerous health problems. Objections raised to such breaches of law have been useless. Imrali is a "legal blackhole", a juridical no-man's-land, a place where human rights are systematically cancelled. Ultimately extralegal spaces like Guantanamo and Imrali redefine the standards of human rights worldwide – far below an acceptable level.

A peace process – but how?

At present a peace process seems more remote than ever. Since the last parliamentary election in Turkey the military has again been pulling the strings concerning the Kurdish question. As a result of this atmosphere, nationalist-baiting is on the rise daily, and racist murders and assaults take place, the victims being Kurds, Armenians, or other Christians. Massacres against ordinary Kurdish people are becoming commonplace. At the same time Kurdish and leftist politicians are subject to a massive repression. The elected representatives of the people are to be discredited by all means possible.

Light at the end of the tunnel...

On the other hand, ever more people, in Turkey as elsewhere, realize that for a political problem like the Kurdish question, no military solution is possible. The set of problems is not insoluble, but on the side of the Turkish state the political will to find a solution is almost completely lacking. The Kurdish side has many times shown its readiness to compromise – now it's Turkey's turn. Ocalan's prison conditions are a barometer of the seriousness of the will to peace of every Turkish government. Both sides know this.



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