

CALL FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE KURDISH QUESTION IN TURKEY

WE, the undersigned, declare that we are Kurds and that we want to be recognised as such, to live in dignity as Kurds in the land of our ancestors and to express our culture freely.

Since the creation of the Turkish Republic, the Kurdish people, who make up about a quarter of its population, have seen its identity treated as if it didn't exist, the use of its language banned and regarded as a crime, its culture denied. The Kurdish people have been deprived of their fundamental human rights.

Today, in Turkey that is applying for membership of the European Union, over a hundred television channels and several hundred radio stations broadcast in Turkish. Turkish is also the language of about thirty universities and establishments of higher education. But there is not a single television channel in Turkey broadcasting in Kurdish. No primary or secondary school and not a single higher educational institution is allowed to teach in Kurdish.

To demand the official use of Kurdish is considered a crime. Even mayors and members of Parliament, elected by the people, are subject to legal proceedings for these "offenses".

Turkey still refuses to recognise the Kurdish reality which it often reduces to a question of "terrorism" and seeks to settle the question by military operations beyond its borders. That only further inflames the tensions underlying Kurdish - Turkish relations and seriously threatens regional equilibrium and the stability of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Despite these relentless practices, from time to time the rulers of the Republic of Turkey evoke the issue of Kurdo - Turkish brotherhood. However, their concept of brotherhood is not that of the Kurds, an ancient people long settled in this part of the world, which is considered one of the cradles of civilisation.

We Kurds want to enjoy of the same rights as our brothers and neighbours. War and violence should not be the lot of any society. It shall not be ours. We reject such a fate.

Today, despite certain imperfections, the government of Iraqi Kurdistan, by recognising the rights of religious and cultural minorities is proving that in the Middle East, various cultural heritages can co-exist peacefully in brotherhood and equality. That is why we believe that it is high time to stop this spiral of repression-revolt-repression that has gone on for two centuries and to silence the guns. We call for a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish question, which can never be resolved by military means. We put forward as a basis for this our people's common minimum demands :

- The Constitution that is being drawn up must not define citizenship on the basis of belonging to Turkish stock. It must put an end to the denial of the Kurdish people's existence. Kurdish citizens must have a system of public education in their own language at all levels. Their right to use their language in public, to create and to develop media in the Kurdish language, to found associations, institutions and political parties to develop their culture must be guaranteed.

- On this basis, in order to create a climate of peace and confidence and, once and for all, to turn the page of violence and armed confrontation, an all-inclusive political amnesty must be decreed, and the PKK must lay down its arms in accordance with procedures yet to be defined. In the same way, Turkey's so-called "village guardian" militias must be dismantled.

These demands do not call into question existing borders. They express fundamental minimum human rights recognised by all democratic countries and possessed by their citizens. It is not demanding such rights

that is a crime, but refusing them is ! Many intellectuals, writers and academics in Turkey have tried for a long time to achieve such a solution. We express our appreciation and gratitude even though their efforts and initiatives have, unfortunately, not produced conclusive results so far. That is why we are calling on European countries and the United States, who bear part of the historic responsibility for the tragedy experienced by the Kurds throughout the 20th Century, not to support policies of negotiation and violence. Let them help prepare favourable ground for a peaceful settlement by empowering one of their statesmen to act as mediator — someone like Bernard Kouchner, Tony Blair, Martti Ahtisaari or Felipe González, who have been involved in the settlement of the Irish, Basque, Catalan and Kosovar questions.

The reduction of inequality between regions within a country is one of the conditions for membership of the European Union. In this way the Kurdish region of Turkey, victim of a policy of neglect and backwardness, needs a positive approach for its socio-economic development. Adequate resources must be committed to the reconstruction of the Kurdish provinces, and to rebuild the 3,400 villages forcibly evacuated by the Turkish State's armed forces during the 1990s on the pretext of security measures. Turkey must again allow the use of original Kurdish names for towns, cities, and villages which it banned over the years. The European Union must consider it a moral duty to draw up a vast development project aimed at ensuring the return to their homes and land of some three million displaced Kurds.

For us, the Kurdish question is no longer just a Turkish issue. It is an issue for Europe and for Humanity. This is why we are addressing Turkish public conscience and international public opinion by asking their most urgent support for a democratic and peaceful settlement.

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