



Kurds gather in their thousands in Dyarbakir to hear about the prospects of a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. Since, then the peace process has come to a halt.

Peace process has again come to a halt

THE peace process in Turkey has once more staggered to a halt. It appears that the armed conflict has resumed. The Turkish army has carried out sorties in the Kandil Mountains where the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) bases are located. Armed Kurdish combatants have entered Turkey and carried out certain operations.

The hopes and aspirations of the Turkish and Kurdish people to find a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish issue in Turkey have been dashed. The question is at what costs? How many young Kurds and young Turks must die before the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will realise that there cannot be any solution other than a peaceful political solution to the Kurdish issue.

The Kurdish Human Rights Action Group (KHRAG) has since its inception in 1998 consistently called for the parties to the conflict to find a peaceful political solution to the Kurdish issue. It appears that the imprisoned Kurdish leader who initiated the peace process in Turkey, is committed to such process and has on a number of occasions suspended the armed conflict in order to give peace a chance.

It appears that Erdogan as the head of the ruling AKP has not committed himself to the peace

process. He has strung Ocalan along in order to serve his vested interest by using the head of the intelligence agency, namely MIT to negotiate with Ocalan in bad faith.

Since the peace process started, Erdogan has not committed himself unequivocally to the peace process or had direct talks with Ocalan. When the direct talks between the PKK and the Turkish Government was about to agree to a peaceful settlement, Erdogan scuttled the talks.

Just eight months ago, the situation looked very different. A joint statement by the Kurdish People's Democratic Party and the ruling AKP had given new impetus to the peace process in Turkey.

Following the collapse of the Oslo Peace Talks in 2011, Archbishop Desmond Tutu with the support of a number of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates and international leaders, in December 2012, made a call on the then Prime Minister of Turkey, Tayyip Erdogan and the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, to resume the peace talks.

The talks were resumed in January 2013 between the Turkish government and Ocalan. The talks resulted in a declaration on Newroz (21 March 2013) by Ocalan announcing a ceasefire

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Editorial

ERDOGAN BETRAYS KURDS

SINCE the inception of KHRAG in 1998, we have advocated consistently that the conflict between the Kurdish people and the Turkish state, which has claimed more than 40 000 lives, be resolved through peaceful negotiations.

The Kurds have been without a place to call home since their territory was carved up by European powers close to a century ago. Initially their demands included the re-establishment of Kurdistan but in recent years they have spoken more of regional autonomy within a constitutional democracy.

Kurds have been denied basic cultural and political rights and have had to endure immense repression over decades. Turkey's constitution makes no provision for the recognition of Kurdish identity. There has been a long process of assimilating the Kurds which included, among other things, the suppression of their language.

In 2013, there appeared to be progress with a ceasefire announced by the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan and legislation guiding a peace process passed in the parliament in Ankara.

This year, the process went off the rails. The Turkish state appears to have opted for the hammer of repression, dealing a severe blow to the peace process.

While ISIS was launching attacks in Syria and Iraq, the Turkish state focused its military operations against the Kurds, instead of ISIS.

It went for short term gain, instead of justice for the Kurds. This may seem enticing if it helps you to shore up your electoral support. But it seriously jeopardises the possibility for peace and justice for all people in the region.

President Erdogan once described the Kurdish problem as "our problem". He appears to have abandoned this approach completely and betrayed millions of Kurds in the process.

Good sense must prevail. Peaceful negotiations for social justice is the only way forward!

KHRAG SHOCKED AT ASSASSINATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER ELCI

INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE ESSA MOOSA, CHAIRPERSON OF KHRAG IN CONNECTION WITH THE ASSASSINATION OF ADVOCATE TAHIR ELCI, CHAIRPERSON OF THE DIYARBAKIR BAR ASSOCIATION.

THE Chairperson of KHRAG, Judge Essa Moosa, has expressed his shock and dismay at the assassination of Advocate Tahir Elci, the Chairperson of the Diyarbakir Bar Association on 28 November 2015 in Diyarbakir. Advocate Elci was a prominent Kurdish human rights lawyer. He also played an active role in the Human Rights Association based in Diyarbakir.

Judge Moosa said that in June 2014 he led a fact-finding mission to Turkey on the status of the peace process in Turkey between Abdullah Ocalan, the Kurdish imprisoned leader and the Turkish government. According to Judge Moosa, the mission interviewed Elci and he said, amongst other things:

"The conflict between PKK and the Turkish State is now 40 years old. I am neither optimistic nor pessimistic about the solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

I am of the view that that the majority of the Kurds would support the peaceful political process of Ocalan.

I am optimistic that a solution will be found in the long term but caution that there are a number of obstacles on the way.

It is not likely that Ocalan will be released within the next 5 years. Before his release, he may be placed under house arrest."



Kurdish women activists.

Judge Moosa said he had the clear impression that Elci was committed to the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue through dialogue and negotiations in Turkey. He believed that he was gunned down by forces that are against finding a peaceful political solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

"It reminds us of the three Kurdish women activists who were gunned down in Paris under similar suspicious circumstances.

Judge Moosa also met him previously as part of the international delegation to moni-

tor the trial of lawyers and political activists in Diyarbakir.

He said: "He was committed to freedom, equality, human dignity and human rights. He had sacrificed his life for those values. In paying homage to him let us honour him as a man of the people."

KHRAG has expressed its sincere condolences to Elci's family "for the tragic loss of a devoted husband and father to his children."

"May they bear the loss with courage and fortitude. Justice shall prevail," said KHRAG.

The Polisario Front: Victory for Saharawi

THE Polisario Front, the liberation movement of the Saharawi people, won a great political and diplomatic victory in the European Court of Justice.

The facts are that the European Union and Morocco concluded an agreement in March 2012 in terms of which Morocco would sell to members of the European Union certain agricultural and fish products and processed agricultural and fish products.

The Polisario Front representing the Sa-

harawi people challenged the validity of the agreement on the basis of international law, the right to self-determination, the unlawful occupation of the land of the Saharawi people and humanitarian law.

The agreement incorporates the land unlawfully occupied by Morocco and which forms the subject-matter of the dispute between the Saharawi people and Morocco. In terms of a settlement brokered by the UN, between the Saharawi people and Morocco,

the Saharawi people both in the liberated zones and in Morocco have to exercise their right to self-determination by means of a referendum. However, Morocco has frustrated the holding of such a referendum by moving the goal posts.

KHRAG calls on the international community, including the European and the African Unions and Morocco and Algeria to ensure that the referendum takes place in a free and fair choice of all the people of Saharawi.

Rebel groups and the Syrian government call truce

A TRUCE has been declared by the Syrian government and certain rebel groups that have been holed up in Homs.

This is a move in the right direction. Only the Syrian people know what is in their best interest and must negotiate a political settlement in the interest of all the people of Syria.

Foreign mercenaries and foreign insurgents do not have the interest of the people at heart. They do so for the money and for the vested interests of their paymasters.

KHRAG calls upon the Kurdish people to negotiate with the government of Assad for democratic autonomy and self-rule of the

areas which they occupy and establish protocols to govern the relationship between them politically, diplomatically and socially.

This will go a long way to bring stability and peace in Syria. The Syrian people deserve such peace and stability for the common good of all the people of Syria.

▶ A year of ebbs and flows

KHRAG in Action

HOPES for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question rose at the beginning of this year and have been all but crushed at the end of the year. KHRAG continued its advocacy work during 2015, promoting the ideal of peace and justice for millions of Kurds in Turkey and the rest of the Middle East.

Activities this year included;

- Various fundraisers that added to our coffers
- Successful closed and open sessions of our Annual General Meeting. The meeting was addressed by the special advisor in the Presidency, Minister Ebrahim Ebrahim.
- Electronic newsletters which have been distributed locally and internationally
- Seminars and workshops including one which was attended by a representative from Western Sahara.
- Media relations and the use of social media such as Facebook and twitter to popularise the work and message of KHRAG
- Several executive committee meetings
- Running an office in the City Centre.
- Arranging activities to mark Newroz, the Kurdish new year
- Screening a documentary on Kobane, by local

journalist Yazeed Kamaldien

- Were represented at conference entitled Healing Journeys of Indigenous Peoples. KHRAG is currently expanding its resources

so that it can do its work more effectively.

A strategic planning session is planned for February 2016 to map out the future role of KHRAG.



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and the unilateral suspension of the armed struggle and the withdrawal of the PKK armed guerillas from Turkey.

In September 2013, Erdogan reciprocated by announcing measures for a reform package that was aimed at kick-starting the peace process. This was followed in July 2014 by the passing of the legal framework, the aim of which was to legitimize the peace process and normalise the political situation in the country.

In September 2014 ISIS, which was part of the coalition forces in Syria fighting the Assad regime attacked KOBANI, a Kurdish dominated enclave in Syria with heavy artillery, tanks and armoured vehicles which they had seized from the Iraqi army. The attack was repulsed by the Peoples Defence Units (YPD) and the Women's Defence Units (YPJ)

However the attack on KOBANI had negatively impacted on the peace process in Turkey and had resulted in the talks being stalled. There were rumours that the Turkish government was supporting ISIS, which they denied.

However on 1 October 2014 a delegation from the HDP who had visited Ocalan in prison issued a press statement on behalf of Ocalan on the siege on KOBANI and the peace process.

In the statement Ocalan emphasised that the reality of KOBANI and the Peace Process is

indivisible. He affirmed that the peace process was still on track. He said that the priority was to frame a Road Map and an Action Plan to implement the terms of the Legal Framework adopted by the Turkish parliament in July 2014.

In June 2014 the Chairperson of the Kurdish Human Rights Action Group led a fact-finding mission to Turkey on behalf of the International Peace and Reconciliation Initiative (IPRI) on the status of the Peace Process. The Executive Summary and the Findings and Recommendations can be downloaded from the IPRI website: www.ipri-initiative.com The Report concludes as follows:

"The successful conclusion of the peace process can also contribute to the democratization of the Turkish state and its society. It can have a positive and beneficial effect and impact on the neighbouring countries that are experiencing conflict and strife. The circumstances in the neighbouring countries dictate that Turkey finds a lasting solution to the Kurdish problem in Turkey to enable it to contribute to peaceful political solutions. Turkey cannot play a meaningful role in the Middle East whilst the Kurdish issue in Turkey remains unresolved. Let us resolve this issue for the common good of all."

On 28 February 2015 the HDP Imrali prison delegation who consulted Ocalan and repre-

sentatives of the AKP government held a joint press conference on the peace process.

The joint press conference and statement by the Kurds and the Turks – the first after 40 years of conflict – represented a positive sign for the prospect of peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question.

If we compare the South African situation with that of the Turkish situation, we find that Mandela like Ocalan, was genuine in trying to find a peaceful political solution to the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa. At the time when Mandela initiated the talks about talks from prison, the political head of the apartheid regime was President PW Botha. The response of Botha was that he was only prepared to talk to Mandela if he renounced violence.

Mandela responded that before he renounces violence, Botha must first renounce violence as he was oppressing the majority of the people of the country by force and violence. The talks between Mandela and the apartheid regime became a stalemate. It was only after Botha was replaced as ruling party leader and head of the government by President FW de Klerk that genuine talks and negotiations followed which led to the new democratic society. Does Erdogan want a similar fate to befall him as that of Botha? Let him decide.

Kurdish News Briefs

► KHRAG News presents a collection of news briefs relating to Kurdish issues around the world. The summaries are followed by links to more detailed information.

Austrian Parliament made historic decision on Kobane and Shengal

A resolution of support for the reconstruction of Rojava's Kobane and the Ezidi town of Shengal in South Kurdistan has been approved by all the parties in the Austrian Parliament. In November 2014 the Austrian Parliament enacted a similar resolution, and is the only European Union member to take concrete steps of support for Kobane. Berivan Aslan, member of the Austrian Parliament Green Party, said the Austrian Parliament's act should set an example to other European Union countries.

<http://anfenglish.com/news/historic-decision-by-austrian-parliament-on-kobane-and-shengal>

Germany continues to criminalize Kurdish political activists

While Turkey uses the fight against ISIS to attack the Kurds, Germany continues to subject Kurdish political activists to repression and criminalizes Kurdish institutions. Eight Kurdish political activists remain in German jails at the moment, of which six arrests happened this year. This is possible through article 129B, which enables the trial of persons and groups involved in any kind of political act of violence outside Germany and is grounded on the European Union's list of terrorists organisations of which the PKK is included since 2 May 2002.

<http://anfenglish.com/news/turkey-attacks-kurds-to-protect-isis-what-about-germany>

Call for struggle against Turkish occupation in South Kurdistan

The Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) Executive Council Co-Presidency has released a statement calling for an enhancement of the struggle in four parts of Kurdistan and all around the world against the occupation of the Turkish state in South Kurdistan.

At the moment the Turkish state has

deployed around 2000 soldiers, tanks and armoured vehicles in South Kurdistan territory outside the knowledge of the parliament and peoples of Turkey. In remark of this, KCK said: "While the Turkish state has just shot down a Russian plane for crossing its borderline for several seconds, Turkey's despatchment of military forces to South Kurdistan without getting permission from the parliaments of Iraq and KRG proves the fact that the Turkish state has become an expansionist fighting force in the Middle East."

<http://anfenglish.com/kurdistan/kck-calls-for-struggle-against-turkish-occupation-in-south-kurdistan>

Barzani meets HDP delegation in Ankara

The President of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Masoud Barzani, who is in Turkey's capital for a series of talks, has met a delegation from the HDP. In the meeting they will discuss a resolution to the Kurdish question, democratic resolution process in Turkey and relations among Kurds.

<http://anfenglish.com/news/barzani-meets-hdp-delegation-in-ankara>

Iran offers Turkey to mediate row with Moscow and calls for cooperation in Syria

Iran has offered to help Turkey resolve current tensions with Russia, and called on Ankara for greater mutual cooperation over Syria despite their different policies, media reports said. "We are worried about the Turkey-Russia tension and believe it is of no benefit to the region's interests," the BBC's Persian service quoted Iranian Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri as saying.

<http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/131220151>

Refugees in Kurdistan survive on the kindness of neighbours

At the moment more than 1.5 million refugees and internally displaced people find

themselves in the Kurdistan Region, stretching refugee camps beyond capacity and straining already limited resources. However, many families survive due to the compassion of their neighbours. Chenar Darvish, 47, said she helps refugees because they are respectful and do not make trouble. "It is our moral duty to help them," she said. "They are not here by choice. Their home was destroyed."

<http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/13122015>

Meeting planned between Kurdistan Region, Turkey and US on ISIS

Kurdish presidential Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein said that a meeting has been proposed between Erbil, Ankara and Washington to discuss the anti-Islamic State strategy. Hussein moreover said that the question of Mosul is under study and that the Kurdish Peshmerga will assist the Iraqi army when the time comes.

<http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/131220151>

Severe human rights violations by the Turkish state

The Human Rights Association (IHD) and the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV), published the 2015 human rights violation report that was prepared during the 10-17 December Week of Human Rights. Ozturk Turkdogan, the general president of IHD who disclosed the report declared "From the

perspective of human rights there is a demand that needs to be met from Turkey. That is to urgently establish peace. When peace is not ensured the right to live is not protected, when the right to live is being abused it is impossible to speak of other human rights". Moreover Turkdogan, said that since there was no intervention in the human right violations conducted in 2015, the United Nations' system has collapsed.

<http://www.kongrakurdistan.net/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/KNK-File-EN-15.12.2015-HumanRights-1.pdf>



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