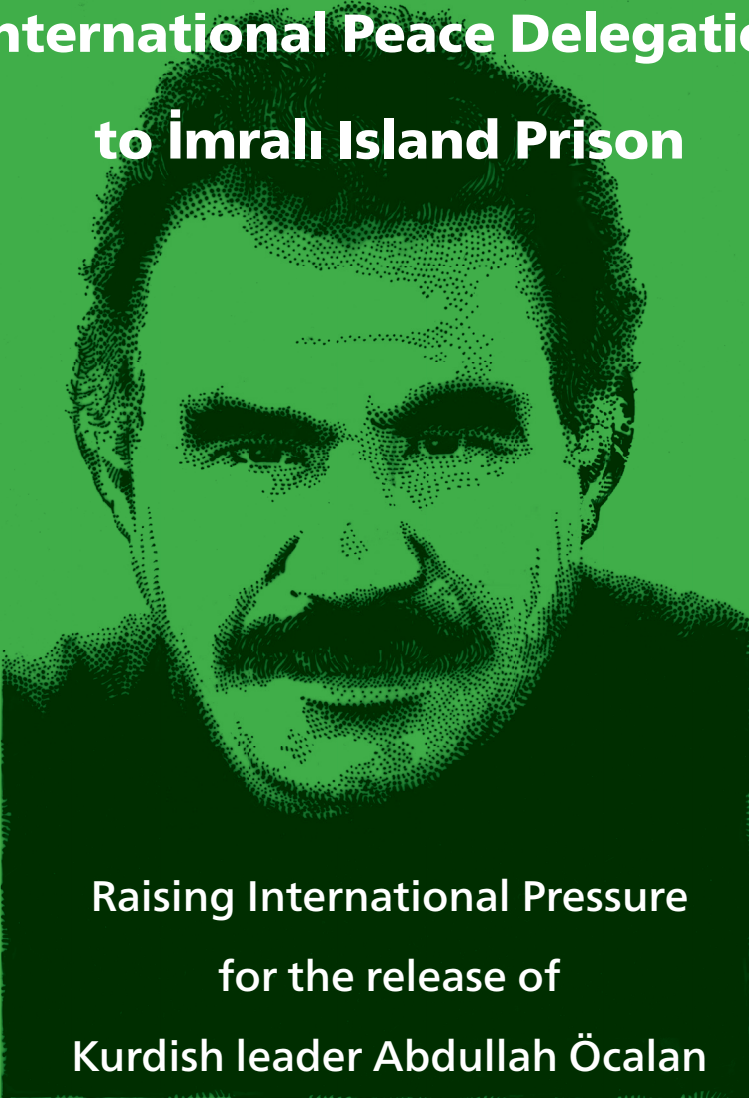


**2022 Report of the  
International Peace Delegation  
to İmralı Island Prison**



**Raising International Pressure  
for the release of  
Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan**

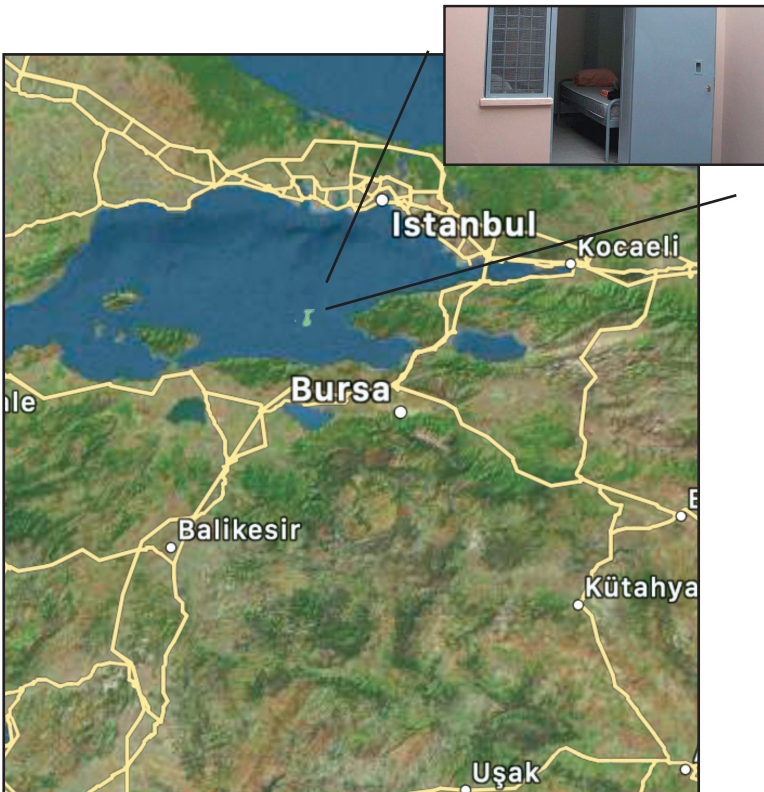
## Contents

Raising International Pressure for the release of Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan	1
Foreword	1
Methodology	2
Introduction	3
Background to Abdullah Öcalan's Abduction, Imprisonment and Isolation	5
Legal Representation	9
Procedure followed by Asrın law office over the last year	11
Application by International Legal Organizations	13
The Current Situation in Turkish Prisons and the Use of Torture by the Turkish State	15
Political Prisoners and Attacks on Kurdish Political Prisoners	18
Attacks on the Women's Movement and Women's Rights	21
Conclusion	23
Recommendations for Action	25
About Abdullah Öcalan	30
Delegate Biographies	31
Contact for more information	36

Cover picture: Jim Fitzpatrick

## Foreword

February 15, 2022, marked twenty-three years since the abduction and imprisonment of Kurdish political leader Abdullah Öcalan. Since his incarceration delegations have visited Turkey numerous times to demand to see Öcalan, who is incarcerated on the island prison İmralı. This year, the biggest international peace delegation to date, organized by the International Initiative “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan”, British trade unions and Peace in Kurdistan, held a two-day virtual fact-finding mission in Turkey, assessing the ongoing twenty-three-year aggravated solitary confinement of Abdullah Öcalan, the recognized leader of the Kurdish people.



## Methodology

Research for this report included a series of interviews conducted remotely over two days, because of Covid-related travel restrictions. Every account provided was internally consistent, and collectively the accounts painted a cohesive picture. Reports from international organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, were also consulted, as was coverage in national and international media, all of which corroborated the delegation's overall findings. The delegation felt certain that the accounts given were honest and, as far as the difficult circumstances of people in Turkey allow, accurate in detail.

## Introduction

Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, is held by Turkey in the most extreme and illegal conditions of any political prisoner in Europe.

As we finally see hope for an end to the pandemic, Turkey has an opportunity to break with its abysmal record regarding the treatment of political prisoners in general and Abdullah Öcalan in particular, the most aggressively and cruelly isolated political prisoner in Europe.

The treatment of Abdullah Öcalan reflects the extreme human rights abuses committed against the Kurdish people in Turkey, which include ongoing extrajudicial killings, torture and disappearances, among other serious human rights violations.<sup>1</sup>

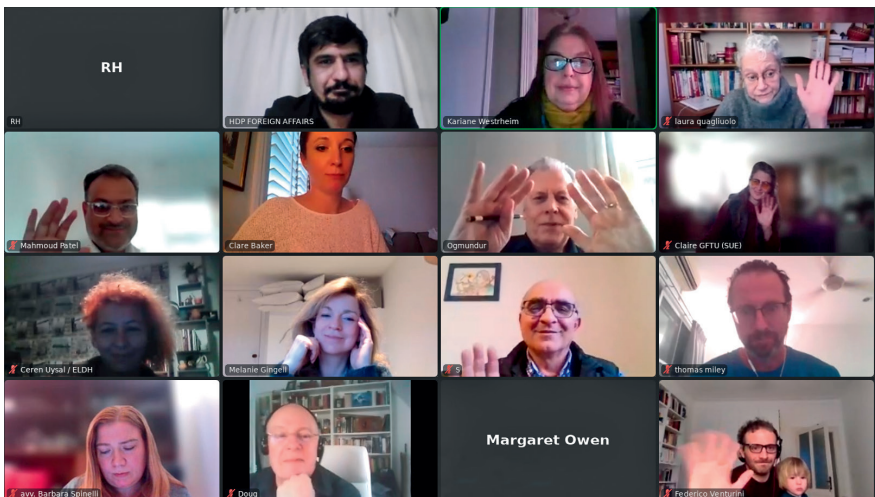
While some initial steps were taken to improve Öcalan's situation after a 2019 mass hunger strike, involving more than three thousand prisoners across 90 prisons around Turkey<sup>2</sup>, demanding that his detention conditions be improved, 2020 and 2021 saw a return to previous policies of extreme and aggravated isolation. There has been no contact of any kind with Mr. Öcalan since March 2021, and there is, consequently, a deep concern and distress in the Kurdish communities in Europe about his treatment and his possible fate.

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1 <https://www.freeocalan.org/news/english/2020-international-peace-delegation-to-imrali-report>

2 <https://www.ihd.org.tr/turkiye-hapishanelerinde-devam-eden-aclik-grevleri-tespit-ve-degerlendirme-raporu-2/>

The International İmralı Peace Delegation 2022 conducted a research mission to Turkey to assess Öcalan's situation after twenty-three years of incarceration. The delegation consisted of representatives of lawyer's associations, human rights lawyers, trade unionists, politicians, academics and writers from across Europe; see "Biographies of the delegates" below.



## Background to Abdullah Öcalan's Abduction, Imprisonment and Isolation

Abdullah Öcalan, founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was abducted in Kenya on February 15, 1999, in a joint operation of the security services of Turkey, the US and Israel. Since then he has been held in the island prison of İmralı.<sup>3</sup>

The legality of this abduction and Mr. Öcalan's subsequent detention was interrogated by the European Court of Human Rights on numerous occasions from February 16, 1999, until its judgement, on May 12, 2005, when it was established that his fundamental rights had been violated, specifically under Articles 3, 5 and 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In particular it was determined that he had not been tried before an independent and impartial tribunal and, for that and other reasons, did not receive a fair trial.<sup>4</sup>

İmralı F Type High Security Closed Prison is an island prison built specifically for Abdullah Öcalan, in February 1999, in complete disregard for international law.

The prison has a special status and operates under an aggravated execution regime known as the "İmralı Isolation System". It is a highly restricted militarised zone, with a thousand troops deployed for complete air, land and sea surveillance in the area. The troops also served as guards at the prison with a single prisoner for twelve years, before the arrival of three additional prisoners.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://freedom-for-Öcalan.com/english/download/the-Öcalan-case.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%22itemid%22:\[%22001-69022%22\]](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%22itemid%22:[%22001-69022%22])

According to early information, he was kept in a single thirteen-square-metre cell with a window that could only open a couple of centimetres. The cell was brightly lit twenty-four hours a day. Since 2013, there has been no reliable information about this precise detention conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Under Turkish law, Öcalan should be allowed to see lawyers once a week and family, through a partition, once a month, but for years even these most minimum requirements have been flagrantly violated leaving this highly guarded prisoner in the most extreme conditions of any political prisoner in Europe.

In 2019, more than three thousand people, nine of whom died, went on hunger strike in various places around the world to protest for Mr. Öcalan's isolation conditions.

The International Initiative has documented violations committed against Abdullah Öcalan and other political prisoners in Turkey over the years and has made urgent appeals for an end to his isolation. It has also called upon the institutions of the Council of Europe (CoE) to investigate and issue a public statement about his conditions.

The Council of Europe Committee on the Prohibition of Torture (CPT) has visited Turkey twenty-nine times since 1999, including ten visits to İmralı prison. During its visit on May 6–19, 2019, it noted that “following the military coup attempt of July 15, 2016, a total ban on contact with the outside world (including correspondence) was imposed on all prisoners held at İmralı prison by the competent enforcement judge (and upheld by the appeal court), which resulted in a type of incommunicado imprisonment. As repeatedly

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5 <http://freedom-for-Öcalan.com/english/download/the-Öcalan-case.pdf>



stressed by the CPT in its dialogue with the Turkish authorities, such a state of affairs is not acceptable and clearly contravenes various relevant international human rights instruments and standards”.

The CPT further noted the extreme isolation in İmralı prison, declaring that “solitary confinement”, as practised on İmralı Island, is “not acceptable” and that steps must be taken to improve this situation “without further delay”. Furthermore, it called upon “the Turkish authorities to carry out a complete overhaul of the detention regime”.

The CPT also urges the Turkish authorities “to take the necessary steps to ensure that all prisoners at İmralı prison are effectively able, if they so wish, to receive visits from their relatives and lawyers. To this end, an end should be put to the practice of imposing a ban on family visits for ‘disciplinary’ reasons. Further, the Committee requests the Turkish authorities to provide—on a monthly basis—an account of the visits which all prisoners held at İmralı prison have received from their family members and lawyers” (para. 51).<sup>6</sup>

These demands were completely ignored by the Turkish authorities. In fact, the Turkish government responded with bans on further visits, whether with family or lawyers, and the prohibition of telephone contact, further aggravating the isolation conditions.

In summary, Öcalan has been persecuted and tortured within the Turkish prison system for twenty-three years. He has endured conditions of extreme isolation. This level of isolation is recognised as torture by the United Nations (UN). His lawyers have worked tirelessly over the decades, leaving no avenue unexplored, but all

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6 <https://rm.coe.int/16809f20a1>

applications have been rejected on overtly political grounds. There is not even a pretence that Öcalan will be granted a fair trial.

The Turkish state has failed to comply with numerous European Court rulings or to remedy the numerous violations of Öcalan's rights that it is guilty of. The conditions of Öcalan's detention constitute a clear and flagrant breach of the UN rules on detention.<sup>7</sup>

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7 [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson\\_Mandela\\_Rules-E-ebook.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf)

## Legal Representation

Öcalan has been represented by Asrın Law Office since his incarceration began.<sup>8</sup> They have worked tirelessly to improve his prison conditions, making regular applications to domestic courts and to the European Court of Human Rights. They report the following history of his imprisonment:

- held in a solitary cell in İmralı prison since February 15, 1999;
- held as the only person in the prison for twelve years; subsequently held in solitary confinement for twenty-three hours a day on weekdays and twenty-four hours a day on weekends;
- his right to see his lawyers was restricted to one hour every week for the first twelve years, but he was constantly prevented from exercising this right;
- received only five visits from his lawyers from May to August 2019 and throughout the eleven-year period since July 27, 2011, with the last visit taking place on August 7, 2019;
- received five visits from his family members since 2014;
- last face-to-face contact was a visit by his brother on March 3, 2020;
- Placed two phone calls in the last twenty-three years, on April 27, 2020, and March 25, 2021, respectively;
- The phone call on March 25, 2021, was interrupted after a short time and could not be resumed; has not been heard from since.

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8 <https://www.freeocalan.org/articles/english/interview-with-ocalans-domestic-lawyers-asrin-law-office>

## **Procedure followed by Asrın law office over the last year**

Throughout 2021, as in previous years, his legal guardian, his family members and his lawyers filed weekly visiting applications with the Bursa Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, which oversees affairs concerning İmralı Island prison. Similar applications were also made to the prison administration through the prosecutor's office. A total of seventy-one applications were made throughout the year, yet no replies were ever received from either body.

As no progress could be made through the usual avenues, an application was filed to the Bursa Judge's Office on March 30, 2021, requesting that Mr. Öcalan's right to receive visits from lawyers, family members and his legal guardian be respected, the barriers preventing lawyers from accessing possible files be lifted, the requirements of the right to counsel be fulfilled, the right to communicate by phone on a routine basis be guaranteed, in line with the legal definition, and that the existing barriers to the right to correspondence be removed to enable the applicants to send and receive letters.

This application was summarily dismissed on the grounds that a disciplinary penalty had been issued on January 29, 2021. This penalty was issued following a secret and illegal procedure and is indicative of the outrageous and egregious way in which applications and procedures on behalf of Mr. Öcalan are denied.

A second application was made on November 22, 2022, raising the fact that Mr. Öcalan is now being held incommunicado, completely deprived of all contact with the outside world and vulnerable to all manner of violations of his fundamental rights.

On December 24, 2021, an application was made to the Constitutional Court for an injunction against the illegal imposition of incommunicado conditions. The application was rejected on January 12, 2022, but only communicated to Asrın Law Office on January 31, 2022.

In summary, Öcalan has been persecuted and tortured within the Turkish prison system for twenty-three years. He has endured conditions of extreme isolation recognised as torture by the UN.<sup>9</sup> His lawyers have worked tirelessly for decades, leaving no avenue unexplored, but all applications have been rejected on overtly political bases. There is not even the pretence of a fair and just process in this case.

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9 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/10/392012-solitary-confinement-should-be-banned-most-cases-un-expert-says>

## Application by International Legal Organizations

On May 26, 2021, a joint call to action and an application to the CPT was made by the Association of Lawyers for Freedom (ÖHD), the Progressive Lawyers' Association (ÇHD), the Human Rights Association (İHD), the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV), the Society and Legal Research Foundation (TOHAV) and Civil Society in the Penal System (CISST). The institutions criticized the CPT for not visiting İmralı prison during its visit to Turkey on January 11–25, 2021. They called for the committee to follow up on implementation of the recommendations outlined in its report of August 5, 2020, and to again visit İmralı prison.<sup>10</sup> A separate call to action was signed by 768 lawyers, including the members and executives of several bar associations, legal organizations, and human rights organizations.<sup>11</sup>

On April 5, 2022, Lawyers' Day in Turkey, the European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH), the European Democratic Lawyers AED and Lawyers for Lawyers sent a petition to the CPT asking them to organize a follow-up visit to İmralı prison and, in particular, to review the government's refusal to permit lawyers to visit their clients.<sup>12</sup> The banning of lawyers' visits to İmralı prison is in violation of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), updated in 2015, the CPT's own recommendations and the Execution Law of Turkey (Law no. 5275). States have an obligation to guarantee rights to detainees without regard to their identity or length of sentence. The ban also violates the rights and privileges

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10 <https://www.medyahaber.info/ohd-ihd-tihv-tohav-cisst-ve-chd-cptye-derhal-hareketi-gec-cagrisi>

11 <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/433766/768-avukat-ocalanin-avukatlariyla-gorusme-talebinin-karsilanmasini-istedi>

12 <https://eldh.eu/en/2022/04/petition-to-the-cpt-follow-up-visit-to-imrali-prison>

of lawyers, as specified in the United Nations Basic Principles on the role of lawyers, in particular principles 8 and 16.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, many human rights organizations released statements critical of the harsh isolation conditions in İmralı Island prison and undertook different initiatives to bring the detention conditions into line with human rights obligations.

Despite clear recommendations from the CPT and the mobilisation of civil society, the government of Turkey has failed to comply with its international obligations and to remedy the numerous violations that have been identified.

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13 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-role-lawyers>

## The Current Situation in Turkish Prisons and the Use of Torture by the Turkish State

The delegation was informed repeatedly that the situation in jails in Turkey had deteriorated significantly over the last year, with approximately 104 inmates dying prematurely, and that the prison population had increased by an extraordinary 89.3 per cent over the last decade.<sup>14</sup> Turkey had the second-highest incarceration rate after Russia of the forty-seven CoE countries in 2021, with 325 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants. The CoE report also showed that Turkey had the sixth most crowded prisons in Europe, with 108 inmates per 100 available places, on January 31, 2021, and a ratio of inmates per prison staff member being 3.9, the highest figure among the forty-seven countries.<sup>15</sup>

Turkey also has the highest number of prisoners convicted of terrorism in Europe, according to the 2021 CoE Annual Penal Statistics on Prison Populations report, better known as SPACE I, Nordic Monitor reported.<sup>16</sup> According to SPACE I data, 32,006 people are currently behind bars for terrorism-related crimes, and 30,555 of these people, or 95 per cent, are in Turkish prisons.<sup>17</sup>

The Free Lawyers Association (FLA) flagged a potential practical deterioration. There is a sense that preparations are underway to legalise hitherto illegal practices. Monitoring boards whose role is to review the cases of those with aggravated life sentences have, instead, been imposing even more punitive conditions on prisoners,

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14 <https://wp.unil.ch/space/space-i/annual-reports>

15 <https://stockholmcf.org/number-of-inmates-in-turkish-prisons-hits-record-high-of-314k-at-end-of-march>

16 <https://stockholmcf.org/turkey-home-to-95-of-prisoners-convicted-of-terrorism-in-europe-report>

17 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55407129>



such as requiring them to attend religious classes and demanding that a certain behavioural etiquette be followed, which is seen as deeply problematic. The kinds of punitive behaviour that have in the past only been seen in İmralı are now becoming common practice in all prisons.

A representative of FLA said: "Isolation has become generalised across the prison population of Turkey. All oppositional voices have been gagged. The CPT came to visit Diyarbakir but despite a declaration by 750 lawyers they have totally failed to respond. We get no feedback from international organisations".

Torture is endemic in detention centres with reports of a noticeable increase in the case of political detainees. The delegation was given details of the high-profile case of Garibe Gezer, who was systematically tortured and sexually assaulted in the Kandıra No. 1 Type F High Security Prison in western Turkey. She died in February 2022. According to prison authorities, Gezer took her own life. The autopsy was conducted in the absence of her lawyers.

Torture has become the state's knee-jerk reaction to political opposition in its detention centres, and the delegation heard that conditions in Turkish prisons for prisoners of conscience have deteriorated significantly, with sick prisoners going untreated, being held incommunicado in solitary confinement and being subject to abuse and humiliation. These practices flourish within a culture of arbitrary arrest and in the absence of fair trials.

Allegations of serious brutality and human rights abuses by the authorities never reach the courts, which, in effect, means that the military and police are granted immunity. For example, no progress has been made in the prosecutor's investigation in the case of Osman Şiban and Servet Turgut, two Kurdish men detained by

military personnel in September 2020, thrown out of a helicopter and later found by their families seriously injured in hospital. Turgut died of his injuries.

The prohibition of torture under international law is absolute and non-derogable. It is enshrined in a plethora of international instruments, including the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Turkey is a signatory. There is also a guarantee against torture in Turkey's constitution. Turkey has an urgent duty to bring these practices to an end and to punish the perpetrators.

The delegation was told: "If we want to change the prison regime in Turkey then we need more democracy. And if we want more democracy in Turkey, we have to focus on İmralı. This mutual relationship is significant. Mr. Öcalan has a very important role in the solution of all these issues. His huge impact and his ideas are significant for peace and for solving all these problems".

## Political Prisoners and Attacks on Kurdish Political Prisoners

The co-chair of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) brought greetings to the delegation from Leyla Güven,<sup>18</sup> the prominent Kurdish politician sentenced to twenty-two years in prison in December 2020, solely for making critical remarks concerning the Turkish invasion of Syria, in 2018. He told the delegation that “since 2021, things have become so much harder and there are mounting violations. We are facing war all over Rojava, with our political movement intimidated and harassed. In Turkey, Kurdish youth are under immense pressure, with people being killed with impunity, heavy armed vehicles being used in the streets against civilians and our youth pushed into the drug trade and prostitution. The pressures are increasing massively”. It is clear that the kind of isolation imposed on Öcalan is deepening across the country. “Öcalan has a democratic solution for the country, but all the international human rights institutions and all the regional bodies are silent”.

The co-chair of the People’s Democratic Congress (HDK) explained, “The legal and political dimension has changed for the worse over the last year. Political prisoners are now dying in jail. It is reminiscent of the violations in Palestinian prisons”.

The delegation was given details of the case of Aysel Tuğluk, a Kurdish politician and human rights lawyer. She was arrested in December 2016, while serving as the co-chair of the People’s Democratic Party (HDP), and sentenced to ten years in prison on terrorism charges on the basis of her activities as a politician, public speeches she delivered and her attendance at funerals of PKK

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18 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55407129>

members. This is part of a pattern of politically motivated judicial harassment of opposition politicians, particularly HDP members, by Turkish authorities that aims to obstruct the HDP's legitimate activities.

Ms. Tuğluk has been diagnosed with dementia, and medical reports have demonstrated that she is not healthy enough to survive under the prison conditions in the Kocaeli F-Type Prison. Nonetheless, her imprisonment continues even as her health rapidly deteriorates.

Providing additional information on systemic issues concerning the treatment of prisoners in Turkey, a letter signed by forty-three bar associations and lawyers and human rights organizations from throughout Turkey and across the world addressed to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health and the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, urged the Turkish government to immediately release Aysel Tuğluk and all seriously ill prisoners, in keeping with both domestic laws and international standards with regard to the treatment of prisoners.<sup>19</sup> They have yet to receive a response.

The HDP co-chairs described how their democratically elected representatives have been purged and imprisoned. The policy of isolation being brought to bear on Öcalan is now also used

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/turkey/turkey-must-immediately-release-aysel-tugluk-and-other-severely-ill>

against the HDP, the third largest political party in Turkey. The state prosecutorial service has asked the courts to ban 687 identified HDP members, including current and former members of parliament and hundreds of party officials, from political life for five years and to cut the treasury funding that the HDP, like other parties, is entitled to. The evidence cited includes speeches and political activities by parliamentary deputies at various points over the eight years of the HDP's existence.

There have been numerous physical attacks on HDP offices across the country, most notably in June 2021 in the western province of İzmir, where a gunman shot dead HDP worker Deniz Poyraz. The trial of the alleged perpetrator, Onur Gencer, a man with reputed to have links to a right-wing militia in Syria, is currently taking place in İzmir.<sup>20</sup>

Now two major lawsuits are underway against the HDP, one to close the party down altogether and the other to criminalise and imprison over a hundred members. The move by the chief prosecutor of the Court of Cassation on March 17, 2021, to close the HDP came shortly after Parliament expelled HDP deputy Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu on the pretext of a conviction related a social media post. Gergerlioğlu's expulsion was really in reprisal for his consistent focus on the thousands of victims of Erdoğan's human rights crackdown. The effort to close the HDP targets the rights of millions of Kurdish voters and subverts the principle of parliamentary democracy.<sup>21</sup>

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20 <https://nrttv.com/En/detail6/2082>

21 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/24/turkey-erdogans-onslaught-rights-and-democracy#>

Meanwhile, in what is known as the “Kobani trial” 108 Kurdish politicians are on trial in a case that is politically motivated revenge for their alleged roles in protests in 2014, sparked by the attempted ISIS takeover of the Syrian border town of Kobani. Prosecutors are seeking multiple life sentences and thousands of years in prison.<sup>22</sup>

The co-chair of the HDP said, “We will stand firm. The legal case will take place in the summer, and there will probably be a finding against us, but we will continue campaigning, and we will find some way to win and to keep our message alive”.

The first parliamentary co-chair of the HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş, remains in prison, despite a binding European Court of Human Rights rulings for his release. In its September session, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers reiterated its call for his immediate release. However, Turkey continues to defy this order.

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22 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/turkey-puts-108-kurdish-politicians-on-trial-over-2014-kobani-protests>

## Attacks on the Women's Movement and Women's Rights

A representative of the Free Women's Association (TJA) explained that slowly and with stealth the kind of isolation imposed on Öcalan has become the standard approach in Turkey. She had just been released from prison herself, having been convicted of trumped up charges under the terrorism legislation. She told the delegation, "There have been unbelievable ramifications for the Kurdish women's movement. The government is acting illegally. All our women's activities and institutions have been shut down under the emergency decrees. Dozens of our activists are in prison and put under isolation. In the last two months, eight people have died in prison, primarily the result of a lack of treatment when people who fall ill in prison. They refuse to release or to treat ill prisoners. At least six hundred political prisoners suffer from serious health conditions. We fear for their lives. This isolation is being pumped through the veins of our society into every limb".

Women's achievements are not recognised, and great efforts are underway to turn back the clock on women's rights. On March 19, 2021, for example, the president issued a decree suddenly withdrawing Turkey from the CoE's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, a ground-breaking treaty strongly supported by the women's rights movement in Turkey. This makes Turkey the first CoE member to ever withdraw from an international human rights treaty.

Many of those who spoke to the delegation were deeply concerned by the tactics that were being used against them. For example,

Kurdish women activists described how their reputations were tarnished and how fear keeps people in their communities from speaking to them, although their activity is entirely peaceful. The delegation heard that women and girls are also being forced into prostitution, and Kurdish youth are being pushed into drug addiction and the drug trade.

The women's movement, as is commonly the case for those who stand up for rights and freedoms in Turkey, is being criminalised and labelled terrorist. This is an extremely immoral but powerful weapon against political movements. It is designed to, and is effective at, inciting fear and mistrust of these movements, both domestically and internationally. This blanket repression, criminalisation and negation of women's political activity could be seen as political femicide.



## Conclusion

Under the cover of the global pandemic, Turkey has deepened its oppression of Abdullah Öcalan. His isolation has been intensified in flagrant violation of both domestic and international law and has become the paradigm for the treatment of the Kurdish people across Turkey and a symbol of the way that Kurdish identity and political aspirations are systematically negated in law and in practice.

Witnesses repeatedly spoke to the delegation about what they see as the overall objective of the wide-ranging violations of Kurdish people's rights in Turkey. They strongly believe that the overarching policy constitutes cultural genocide and a radical bio-political reconstruction of the region, encompassing not only Mr. Öcalan's isolation and the political attacks on the HDP but also the destruction of historic neighbourhoods and monuments, the Ilusu dam project and the criminalisation of anyone who advocates for Kurdish aspirations and democratic rights.

Mr. Öcalan, now seventy-three years old, remains a singular human presence at the heart of an industrial-scale military prison system created specifically for him twenty-three years ago. The ending of the apartheid system in South Africa showed the world the importance of having free and legitimate representatives on both sides of negotiations that seek to resolve a conflict. Today Öcalan is the Mandela of the Kurdish people, and his freedom is essential to a political resolution of the Kurdish question.

In the face of the Turkish authorities' total disregard for the recommendations of the UN and the CoE and for its own national laws, it is essential that every individual and every institution that holds rights dear, exert greater pressure on the Turkish authorities, with a view to immediately ensuring Mr. Öcalan his fundamental rights, including the right to see his lawyers and family, and for the reopening of peace negotiations.

European institutions and the UN have long tolerated the Turkish authorities' violation of its international obligations. We ask for a stronger voice to be immediately raised demanding that Abdullah Öcalan's isolation to be ended and that the human rights of all political prisoners in Turkey be guaranteed.

## Recommendations for Action

- (1) It is vital that pressure continues to be put on the Turkish state to end the isolation of Abdullah Öcalan. Pressure should also be applied to international human rights bodies, particularly those of the CoE. The CPT should be urged to exercise its investigative capacity to the fullest in the case of İmralı. The PACE should pressure the government of Turkey to implement the recommendations of the CPT and the rulings of the ECtHR and to abide by the ECHR, at the risk of sanctions. The Committee for Legal Affairs and Human Rights should also follow up on the recommendations of the CPT. International human rights bodies should be encouraged to declare Öcalan's isolation a crime against humanity.
- (1) Governments of the international community should be lobbied to intervene against Öcalan's isolation and other human rights abuses on the part of the Turkish government. Relevant individuals, such as members of parliament, should be urged to raise questions and pass motions concerning the situation in Turkey, to express their support for an end of Öcalan's isolation and to lobby their governments to take action. Individuals should also be urged to ask Turkish government officials, such as the Minister of Justice, for a meeting to express their concerns and ask questions. Political parties should be encouraged to link their party to the HDP and to express solidarity with the imprisoned MPs.

- (1) International NGOs, such as Amnesty International, must be appealed to to take immediate action against the Öcalan's isolation and the overall situation in Turkey. International NGOs should also be urged to form ties with NGOs and human rights organisations in Turkey and to attempt to intervene where possible. Doctors Without Borders and other medical bodies should be encouraged to reach out to Turkish authorities, seeking permission to visit Öcalan to assess his health and to otherwise provide independent medical service to prisoners in Turkey.
- (1) International solidarity among trade unions is also necessary. Trade unions should be encouraged to officially express their solidarity with independent trade unions in Turkey, speaking out publicly against the decline of workers' rights in Turkey and the state's crackdown on independent trade unions and drafting motions in support of Öcalan and the Kurdish movement. Additionally, trade unions should condemn the state-sanctioned unions in Turkey that participate in the marginalisation and criminalisation of workers and seek their exclusion from international trade union confederations and conferences.
- (1) Social movements throughout the world should be encouraged to establish ties of solidarity with the Kurdish freedom movement and other opposition groups in Turkey. For instance, the Plaza de Mayo mothers of Argentina have expressed solidarity with and visited the Saturday Mothers in Turkey

and should be encouraged to continue to do so. Women's movements throughout the world should be encouraged to express solidarity with the Kurdish women's movement with written statements, video messages and visits to Turkey.

- (1) Lawyers from around the world should be encouraged to file appeals to international bodies about the situation and to condemn the illegality of the isolation policy and the treatment of Kurdish people, as a means of applying pressure to the Turkish state. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to collaborate with lawyers in Turkey at meetings both in Turkey and abroad and to learn more about the legal specifics of the situation, and they should work with lawyers in Turkey and each other to draft legal objections.
- (1) Strong efforts should be made to raise global awareness of the situation in Turkey. This can include solidarity campaigns, cultural solidarity projects, such as collaborative documentaries or art pieces with artists in Turkey, and campaigns to boycott Turkey. Efforts should also be made to counter the pro-Turkish state narrative in the mainstream media and to accurately portray the authoritarian rule in Turkey, which is actively suppressing political and civil liberties.
- (1) Populations around the world should be encouraged to take action, including writing letters to elected representatives to pressure their own governments

and the government of Turkey, writing letters to NGOs urging them to take additional action, writing letters of protest to Turkish officials and writing letters of support to prisoners in Turkey. Individuals should also be encouraged to spread the word about the situation in Turkey, sign petitions, and join solidarity campaigns.

- (1) More delegations consisting of all manner of people, including politicians, academics, public figures and trade unionists, should be organised to visit Turkey and the Kurdish region. These delegations should meet with organisations in Turkey and request meetings with Turkish government officials, to give the delegates first-hand experience of the conditions, offer support to those afflicted and further spread awareness of situation.

## About Abdullah Öcalan

Abdullah Öcalan actively led the Kurdish liberation struggle as the head of the PKK from its foundation in 1978 until his abduction on February 15, 1999. He is still regarded as a leading strategist and the most important political representative of the Kurdish freedom movement. In isolation conditions at İmralı Island prison, Öcalan authored more than ten books that revolutionized Kurdish politics. Several times he initiated unilateral cease-fires of the guerrilla and presented constructive proposals for a political solution to the Kurdish question. For several years, Turkish state authorities led a “dialogue” with Öcalan. Ever since the government broke off the talks in April 2015, Abdullah Öcalan has been held in total isolation with no contact whatsoever with the outside world and the Turkish state aggressively attacks Kurdish areas in Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

A short political biography of Abdullah Öcalan can be found here:

<https://ocalanbooks.com/#/book/freedom-shall-prevail>

## Delagate Biographies

**Ögmundur Jónasson** is a former leader of the Public Service Unions in Iceland, was a member of the Icelandic Parliament and served as a minister for a number of years, including a period as minister of justice. He is an honorary associate of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He is also a signatory to International Initiative “Freedom for Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan”.

**Clare Baker** is an international officer of Unite, a union in the UK, and is at present the secretary of the UK trade union campaign, Freedom for Öcalan.

**Baroness Christine Blower** is a member of the House of Lords and the former general secretary of the National Union of Teachers in the UK and at present co-chair of the UK trade union campaign, Freedom for Öcalan.

**Prof. Radha D’Souza** is a critical scholar, social justice activist, barrister and writer from India. She has worked in New Zealand and currently teaches law at the University of Westminster, in the UK.

**Melanie Gingell** is a barrister and a lecturer on International Human Rights Law and Feminist Legal Theory, has served as a member of the executive of the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales and is a member of the steering committee of Peace in Kurdistan.

**Dr. Thomas Jeffrey Miley** is a prolific writer and scholar of sociology at the University of Cambridge, who has



participated in a number of delegations to Turkey and Kurdistan, including to Rojava. He has published extensively about this experience, both in books and in articles. He is a member of the executive board of the EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC).

**Doug Nicholls** is the UK's longest serving trade union general secretary. He was first elected general secretary of the Community and Youth Workers' Union, in 1987, and now leads the General Federation of Trade Unions.

**Claire Jones** has been active in the trade union movement for thirty years. Claire is the general secretary of the Society of Union Employees (SUE) and member of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) executive. SUE is the oldest independent trade union for workers employed by trade union.

**Andrea Kocsondi** is a trainee probation practitioner with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), an active member of the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO), a trade union and professional association that represents probation and family court staff, and a recently elected member of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) executive.

**Professor Kariane Westrheim** teaches Educational Science at the University of Bergen, Norway. Her research interests include social and political movements and educational opportunities in prison. Prof. Westrheim has carried out fieldwork in Kurdish regions on several occasions and has

participated in previous delegations. Since 2004, she has been the chair of the EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC).

**Shavanah Taj** is Wales Trade Union Congress's first Black and minority ethnic (BME) general secretary. She joined Wales TUC in February 2019 from the Public and Commercial Services Union, where she had been the Welsh secretary since 2013. Shavanah is a passionate campaigner and activist and can often be found contributing speeches at roundtable debates and protest marches on issues like anti-racism, human rights, women's rights, fair pay and fair work and climate justice.

**Dimitrios Roussopoulos** is a political activist, ecologist, writer, editor, publisher, community organizer, and public speaker. In 1969, he created a book publishing project known as Black Rose Books. The not-for-profit radical publisher has published more than five hundred books on a variety of issues. In 2012, he founded the Transnational Institute of Social Ecology, a network of intellectual/activists working in various cities in Europe.

**Barbara Spinelli** is co-president of European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH) and a human rights lawyer, banned from Turkey for "her collaboration with Abdullah Öcalan's lawyers". She is a member of the Bologna Bar Council Human Rights Committee and of the Commission for Relations in Mediterranean Area of the Italian Bar Council (CNF), as well as a femicide expert for the UN. Awards: SEN Prize for outstanding work in defence of women's right; CNF medal of merit for her activities as international observer.

**Şerife Ceren Uysal** is co-secretary general of European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH) and a human rights lawyer and activist. She has been an executive board member of the Progressive Lawyers Association since 2015 and has been based in Vienna since December 2016. She was awarded the Dr. Georg Lebiszczak-Prize for Freedom of Speech, in Austria.

**Dr. Federico Venturini** is a research associate at the University of Udine, in Italy. His current research focuses on sustainability and participatory processes. He is member of the advisory board of the Transnational Institute of Social Ecology. Recently he co-edited the book *Your Freedom and Mine: Abdullah Öcalan and the Kurdish Question in Erdoğan's Turkey* and the volume *Social Ecology and the Right to the City: Towards Ecological and Democratic Cities*.

**Laura Quagliuolo** is an Italian editor and author of children's schoolbooks, long active in international work, especially on women's rights. At present, she is active in RETE JIN, an Italian network of women who support the Kurdish women's movement and is part of the committee The Time has Come: Freedom for Öcalan.

**Margaret Owen OBE** is a UK barrister whose work focuses on women's human rights, especially widows' rights, particularly in conflict zones. She has long been engaged on Kurdish issues, first as women's rights adviser to Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP), and then as a patron of Peace in Kurdistan, for whom she has often visited Turkey to report on political trials and human rights violations, and has also

visited the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).

**Mahmoud Patel** is an academic, legal scholar and human rights activist. He is the chairperson of the Kurdish Human Rights Action Group (KHRAG) in South Africa and was appointed to the ideology commission of the South African Communist Party (SACP) in the Western Cape by the head of the ANC Research and Development Unit (Parliament). Mahmoud Patel is a former Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) operative.

## Contact for more information

International Initiative “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan” is a multinational peace initiative for the release of Abdullah Öcalan and a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. It was established immediately after he was abducted in Nairobi and handed over to the Republic of Turkey on February 15, 1999, following a clandestine operation by an alliance of secret services. Part of its activity is to document violations committed against Abdullah Öcalan and other political prisoners in Turkey.

[www.freeocalan.org](http://www.freeocalan.org)  
[info@freeocalan.org](mailto:info@freeocalan.org)

Peace in Kurdistan was launched in October 1994 at a meeting in London with Lord Avebury, Harold Pinter, Arthur Miller, John Berger, Noam Chomsky, John Austin MP and Jeremy Corbyn MP with the aim of building a network of politicians, academics, lawyers, writers, trade unionists and activists to work with and in support of the Kurdish freedom movement and achieving a peaceful political solution of the Kurdish question taking inspiration from Abdullah Öcalan’s ideas and struggles. Since 1999 it worked in support of the *International Initiative – Freedom for Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan* and since 2016 the *Freedom for Öcalan trade union campaign*.

<https://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/>  
[estella@gn.apc.org](mailto:estella@gn.apc.org)

The Freedom for Öcalan trade union campaign is a UK trade union-backed initiative to secure the release of imprisoned Kurdish political prisoner Abdullah Öcalan. The campaign has over 16 of the major trade unions in the UK and is supported by the TUC. The campaign's objectives are the immediate release of Abdullah Öcalan and all Kurdish political prisoners, to lobby for peace in the region and a peaceful resolution to what has come to be known as the "Kurdish Question" and to promote Kurdish civil society in the interests of democratic rights and social justice.

<http://www.freedomforocalan.org.uk>  
[info@freedomforocalan.org.uk](mailto:info@freedomforocalan.org.uk)





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