

► *The Kurdish Question*

Turkey reform package does not go far enough

THE peace initiative in Turkey to resolve the long-standing Kurdish question inspires as much hope and optimism as it generates doubt and cynicism.

On 30 September 2013 the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the long-awaited reform package to kick-start the Kurdish peace process.

The package includes the lowering of the electoral threshold for political parties, permitting the teaching of Kurdish at private schools, allowing villages to use their traditional Kurdish names, authorising women to wear headscarves in state institutions, which were previously prohibited, decriminalising the use of Kurdish letters not found in the Turkish alphabet.

These reforms do not go far enough to satisfy the concerns of the Kurdish people. Gultan

Kisanak, the co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) said at a press conference that the package of reforms "was not enough to satisfy the Kurdish people and did not meet the expectations of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP)."

On 21 March 2013 which is the new year of the Kurdish calendar, Abdullah Ocalan the leader of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, announced a ceasefire of the armed conflict in Turkey and instructed the Kurdish armed combatants to leave the country. The object was to give peace a chance.

Erdogan's package does not deal with the issue of the thousands of Kurdish activists, including Ocalan, who are in prison for politically related offences.

It continues to prosecute journalists and lawyers and other activists who have been doing their professional duties on the pretext that they are aiding and abetting terrorists and terrorist organisations.

Hundreds of children who have been caught up in the protest action against the repressive measures are still in prison. They are held under the anti-terror legislation in circumstances which are in conflict with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Turkish government has failed to deal with the anti-terror legislation which criminalises activists who advocate and fight for fundamental rights such as freedom of association, freedom of expression and certain universally accepted basic human rights.

The intention of the Turkish Government in finding a genuine and lasting peace on the Kurdish question must be called into question. They are not negotiating with the Kurdish leaders in good faith.

Because of the attitude of the Turkish Government, the further withdrawal of the Kurdish armed combatants has been halted. This holds serious consequences for the resumption of the armed conflict in Turkey.

Leaders, especially those who hold power, have a responsibility to put the peace process firmly on track.

Editorial

Brave Leadership Is required

THE credibility of the peace process aimed at resolving the Kurdish Question is on the line.

The Turkish authorities appear to be dragging their feet and failing to respond to critical issues related to the process.

For the initiative to have momentum, it is critical that there is plan to deal with the matter of political prisoners and the scrapping of the anti-terror laws which are being so indiscriminately applied.

Turkey has some 8 000 to 10 000 people in prison for politically-related offences. Dozens of journalists are behind bars and 46 lawyers are on trial. At least 16 of those lawyers have been denied bail and have been languishing in jail for almost two years.

Turkey finds itself at the top of the heap of countries that suppresses freedom of expression and has one of the world's highest numbers of political prisoners.

Most of the political prisoners are Kurdish men and women, either awaiting trial or serving long sentences for various offences. A number of the detainees are senior Kurdish political figures, including mayors and members of Parliament.

Particularly disturbing is the growing number of children who end up in the prison system. This is an indictment on Turkish society.

The high levels of repression must end. It causes much suffering for the Kurdish people and does harm to Turkey's image in the eyes of peace-loving people around the world.

A move towards peace and the observance of fundamental human rights will enhance Turkey's prestige in the Middle East and the rest of the World.

President Erdogan must show statesmanship by presenting a comprehensive package that gives the peace process new momentum.

The time calls for brave leadership.



Kurdish protesters took to the streets of Paris after the killing of three activists in January. The protests have continued through the year.

News Briefs on the Kurdish issue

Lawyers appear in Istanbul

Forty-Six Kurdish lawyers appeared in an Istanbul Court at the end of September, in terms of anti-terror legislation. They are being prosecuted for their work defending imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan.

The trial has been dragging on for almost two years and 16 of the group have not been granted bail. The matter was again postponed.

Between 10,000 and 12,000 people have been imprisoned under Turkish anti-terror law since 2009.

In another trial, over 200 politicians and elected officials of the pro-Kurdish party, the BDP, are being tried together in a lengthy and arduous case that has been going on for over two years. Trade unionists, journalists, students, human rights defenders and members of Kurdish civil society have been arrested and tried in their hundreds. Turkey has a third of the world's prisoners classified as 'terrorist', according to a member of the Peace in Kurdistan delegation that attended the court case of the lawyers.

Paris Assassination: Links investigated

French investigators are collecting evidence about the alleged link to Turkey of a man being investigated for the assassination of three women Kurdish activists in Paris in January this year.

Sakine Cansiz, 55, Fidan Dogan, 32 and 25-year-old intern Leyla Saylemez, were killed execution style at a Kurdish office.

This led to emotional scenes in Paris and other European cities, where Kurds gathered in their thousands to express their outrage. Cansiz was a close comrade of Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan.

Some evidence has emerged to suggest that Omer Guney, a Turkish immigrant from Germany,

made several trips to Turkey in late 2012.

Meanwhile, thousands of women protested in various European cities last month about slow progress in the investigation.

Ministers Committee of Council of Europe to watch Turkish police closely

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe said at the end of September, that it will be closely following the use of force by the Turkish police while dispersing demonstrations and the application of related court rulings.

The committee, as the body responsible for supervising the implementation of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) rulings,



A Kurdish speaker at a rally in Turkey, in front of a huge backdrop of Abdullah Öcalan.

discussed 37 ECtHR judgments against Turkey regarding the disproportionate use of police force. It was emphasized in the assembly that the court continues to receive numerous case files from Turkey related to this issue, despite the ECtHR's first ruling about an incident in 2006 that stated that the excessive use of police force in protests was against the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-327607-ministers-committee-of-council-of-europe-to-watch-turkish-police-closely.html>

Government takes steps on headscarf, Kurds, electoral system

The Turkish government will lift its much-debated ban on wearing headscarves in public offices, permit education in mother tongues in private schools and commence a debate on the country's much-criticized electoral system with a long-anticipated democratization package announced in September. Prime

Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said the package was a result of Turkey's "democratization history," particularly over the last 11 years. "This package is not a first and will not be the last package of such reforms," Erdoğan said, stressing that the package was not the "final point" of a reform process that he claimed the ruling party had been pursuing since coming to power in 2002.

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-lift-ban-on-headscarf-introduce-kurdish-education-with-democracy-package-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=55393&NewsCatID=338>

"Sayın Öcalan" Ruled as Freedom Of Expression

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) found the Turkish State guilty of violating freedom of expression one more time. The case concerned 19 applicants who stated that they had taken part in a petition campaign which had involved between 60 and 70 persons. Relying on Article 10 (freedom of expression), the applicants complained about their conviction for having used the word "sayın" – which, they alleged, is a term of courtesy – when sending 67 letters on 18 July 2008 to the Halfeti State. The court ordered Turkey to pay 60,660 euros to 19 applicants. On 18 July 2008, 67 individuals sent letters to the Halfeti State Prosecutor within a petition campaign called "If addressing [someone] using the term "sayın" is an offence, then I too say "sayın" Abdullah Öcalan, I commit this offence and I denounce myself".

<http://www.bianet.org/english/world/150332-sayin-ocalan-ruled-as-foe>



Pictures of the three women activists assassinated in Paris in January this year, are displayed at a gathering in Paris.

KHRAG chairperson Judge Essa Moosa stands alongside three paintings of Kurdish and South African struggle heroes, including Nelson Mandela, Abdullah Ocalan, Dulcie September and Sekine Cansiz. The paintings, by Suleiman Christian, were displayed at the KHRAG AGM.



An eventful year in Kurdish politics

KHRAG chairperson Essa Moosa presented his report to the organisation's AGM in August. Below is a summary of his address.

During the year under review there have been important political developments on the Kurdish issue on the international front and on the local front, we have engaged on various issues to keep abreast of the international developments.

INTERNATIONAL FRONT

On the international front the following matters engaged us:

1. On the 9th January 2013, three Kurdish women activists, namely CANSIZ, DOGAN and SAYLEMEZ, were shot and killed at close range in execution style at the Kurdish Information Centre in Paris. A man has been arrested for the killing.
2. In late 2012, Archbishop Tutu made a call for the resumption of talks between Turkey and the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan for the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey. Following such call the International Peace and Reconciliation Initiative (IPRI) was launched in Brussels on 3 December 2012.
3. On 21 March 2013, the Kurdish New Year's Day, Ocalan issued a statement from prison calling for an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of the PKK guerrillas from the Turkish territories. This process is presently on-going. The Turkish Government has appointed a Parliamentary Commission to draft a democratic Constitution for the country which will hopefully make provision for the rights of minorities including the Kurdish minority.
4. A delegation from Turkey comprising politicians from all the political parties in Turkey, representatives from Turkish NGO's,

media and business, recently visited South Africa in order to be exposed to the South African peace process from apartheid to democracy. Some of the members of the delegation were invited to KHRAG's offices and exposed to its work.

5. In the past year, we contributed to an international Million Signature Campaign for the release of Ocalan. The latest count shows that we have jointly collected approximately 750 000 signatures. Let's reach our target of a million signatures by 10 December 2013.
6. During the latter part of 2011 and early part of 2012, the Kurdish media in Europe came under threat of closure because of their alleged association with PKK. The court in Denmark recently confirmed the closure of ROZ TV and imposed a heavy penalty on the TV station. We have issued statement condemning the assault on the freedom of expression and of media. The media committee is presently keeping a brief on the developments and it may be necessary to embark on the campaign to Save the Kurdish Media in conjunction with our colleagues in Europe.
7. As a human rights lawyer, I was invited to attend a few conferences in Europe and Turkey to speak on the South African peace process and the constitutional development from apartheid to democracy. Many countries in conflict are looking to South Africa for guidance and direction. During the course of one of these visits, I briefed the Deputy Minister of Foreign Relations, Ebrahim Ebrahim, Ambassador Abdul Minty, SA Ambassador to the UN and their staff at the UNHRC conference in Geneva on the Kurdish issue in Turkey, Syria and in the Middle East. I also met representatives of Western Sahara, of Palestine, of Tamil

Tigers of Sri-Lanka and of Basque Country. In Turkey I met representatives of the IRA. They are all victims of oppression in their respective countries.

LOCAL FRONT

1. KHRAG is an independent body and does not receive any funding from any source. It is entirely reliant on its members to generate income. Razia Banu Bharoochi, our Secretary, in her report states and I quote: "The Fundraising Committee, under the leadership of Beverley Joffe and Cido Yildiz, has hosted several fundraising events during the course of the year. Notably the Bollywood Nights at the Bo-Kaap Civic Centre, the Dance in the Park at the Cape Town Gardens and the Riaad Moosa comedy show at the Baxter Theatre. This was the most successful fundraiser so far and we hope to arrange another before the end of the year." I want to take this opportunity to extend to Riaad Moosa our sincere thanks and appreciation for donating the net proceeds of the show to KHRAG.

2. Our financial situation is relatively fair. This emerges from the report of Treasurer, Hoosain Adam, who has held a very firm control on our finances. He has introduced certain financial systems which KHRAG has implemented and this has enabled him to monitor and keep control over our finances. He has presented an audited financial statement for consideration and adoption at this meeting. The treasurer has called on people to pledge monthly amounts to KHRAG.

3. Our administration has to be strengthened. We instituted the Religious and Foreign Relations Desk but we still have to implement the Desk. We also approved the establishment of a Women's Wing.

4. Our Media Sub-Committee has done sterling work. It has regularly produced KHRAGNEWS, both the printed and the electronic copy. KHRAGNEWS has been distributed both locally and internationally. It informs members, associates, friends and supporters, both nationally and internationally of the work of KHRAG. The Media Sub-Committee has also issued, from time to time, press releases on topical issues of the day.

5. We have submitted a Resolution to the ANC for adoption on the Kurdish issue. We managed to get a number of the ANC structures and its alliance partners to approve the Resolution. It is now with the National Executive Council of the ANC for consideration.

6. In conclusion I want to extend my sincere appreciation and thanks to all our office-bearers, convenors, executive members and the general membership for their unstinting dedication and loyalty to KHRAG.

KHRAG hosts successful AGM

KHRAG hosted a memorable AGM in August and new executive has swung into action on a number of fronts.

The AGM, held at Baran's in Cape Town, was attended by more than 80 people from a range of civil society formations across the City.

The open session, addressed by Professor Shamil Jeppie and Judge Essa Moosa, was hosted jointly by KHRAG, the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) and the International Labour and Research Group (Ilrig). The session was chaired by Ilrig's Leonard Gentle.

The situation in Egypt, dynamics in the Middle East and the Kurdish question were the subjects of the various addresses. Invited guests directed many questions at the speakers.

Earlier a smaller meeting of members discussed the peace process in Turkey and progress with KHRAG. The treasurer reported a healthy financial budget, the international signature campaign for the release of Abdullah Ocalan (which KHRAG is part of) had collected 750 000 signatures and there was substantial movement in the area of media and communication.

The following members were elected to the executive:

Essa Moosa (chairperson); Father Matt



Delegates in discussion during a break in the Peace Building Conference hosted by the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality in September.

Esau (Deputy Chair); Razia Bharoochi (Secretary); Hoosain Adam (Treasurer); Mansoor Jaffer (Communication); Ameer Hussein (Youth Representative); Beverly Joffe (fundraiser) Baran Kalay, Shumiez Basson, Cetin Kalcin and Eesa Rinquet (additional members).

Moon Over Kurdistan

KHRAG raised substantial funds at a danc-

ing fundraiser called Moon over Kurdistan, which was held at Mesopotamia Restaurant in October.

KHRAG raises funds to maintain its office and to pay for administration costs. The office is located next to St George's Cathedral.

Conference in Diyarbakir

Our Communication Officer, Mansoor Jaffer, delivered a paper at a conference hosted by the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality in September.

The conference was about Local Government and Peace Building Processes. The paper focused on the transition of local government in South Africa, from apartheid to democracy.

Over 100 people from Turkey, various European countries, Palestine, Lebanon and South Africa attended the conference.

Communication

KHRAG continues to bring out a quarterly newsletter and communicate through mainstream and social media. The current newsletter is being distributed electronically to stakeholders in South Africa and other parts of the world.



Delegates and municipal officials from Germany and South Eastern Turkey who attended the conference. Participants came from Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, the Basque region of Spain, Ireland, Holland, Catalonia, Belgium, South Africa and Palestine.



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