



The march in Strasbourg ended in a huge rally

Ocalan freedom call rapidly spreads

TENS of thousands of Kurds and their supporters turned out in various town and countries last month to demand the release of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Gatherings took place on 15 February, which marked the 15th anniversary of his abduction and arrest in Kenya, while he was on his way to South Africa to seek assistance from the late former President Nelson Mandela.

In Turkey, there were demonstrations and clashes with police in Diyarbakir, Cizre, Batman, Sirtak and other towns.

The biggest gathering took place in Strasbourg in France where no fewer than 30 000 people from across Europe took part in a mass march.

The rally was organised by the Federation of Kurdish Associations in France (FEYKA).

Millions of Kurds regard Abdullah Öcalan as their political representative. He is the most important exponent of their struggle for rights and democracy and has become a symbol for the freedom of the Kurds.

Öcalan opposes separatism and secessionism and stands for a democratic Middle East where all the people have equal rights.

The ongoing worldwide signature campaign for his freedom has collected 2.4 million signatures. TIME Magazine has elected him among the 100 most influential leaders in 2013.

The International initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan— Peace in Kurdistan", has called for

the release of Ocalan and all political prisoners in Turkey. They said: "Since 1993, Öcalan has been trying to create conditions that are suitable for a peaceful solution of the conflict. Even after his illegal abduction and imprisonment in 1999, he has remained a consistent advocate of a peaceful, political solution. For years he has been leading talks with the Turkish government. In 2009 he presented his "Road Map for Negotiations". In 2013 he called for a withdrawal of the guerilla forces, effectively stopping the armed conflict."

Öcalan has been held under isolation conditions ever since his abduction in 1999. His inhuman isolation on Imrali Island has been subject to massive criticism by the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee (CPT). For 11 years Öcalan has been the only prisoner on the island—watched over by more than 1,000 soldiers and hidden from the outside world. Now he is one of six inmates in isolation. July 2011 marked the beginning of a renewed complete isolation of the prison island. Many of Öcalan's lawyers are imprisoned. No lawyer can visit the island. This is a Europe-wide record—the longest ban on contacts with lawyers: more than 2½ years!

"Öcalan's freedom is not only a key demand of millions of Kurds. Together with the release of the other political prisoners, it is a necessary step on the way to peace.", said the International initiative.

Editorial

A JUST PEACE FOR ALL

HOPE for a negotiated settlement of the Kurdish question in Turkey, seems to go through constant cycles of ebbs and flows.

Last year, the Kurdish liberation movement, the Kurdish People's Party, started withdrawing their troops to their mountain base. The President of Turkey, Mr Recep Erdogan, welcomed this as a positive move.

The Kurds have waited for reciprocity, but there has been very little. There have been talks with Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan on the Island of Imrali where he is imprisoned, but no indication of his possible release.

Thousands of other political prisoners still languish in prison and there is little movement towards scrapping the contentious anti-terror laws.

As we stated in our last publication for 2013, 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.

Censorship and repression of journalists and the media continues unabated and the imprisonment of children has reached disturbing proportions.

These issues and the internal politics of Turkey have dampened hopes for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question. Turkey has been thrown into a corruption scandal and the forthcoming local election has turned attention away from the peace process.

We have said it before, but only reiterate that good faith is required on both sides. The Turkish state has a special responsibility as it holds political power. It must move rapidly to release Öcalan and other political prisoners, scrap the anti-terror laws and build a platform for genuine negotiations that will lead to a just peace for all.

Kurdish News Briefs

NEWS briefs on the Kurdish question are compiled and distributed each week by the Peace in Kurdistan group in the United Kingdom. We present some for your information. Should you wish to have more details, you can follow-up on the website addresses provided.

Human Rights Association demands Ocalan release

Human Rights Association branches in Turkey held a press conference in late February to demand the release of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Seventeen branches came together to publically call for the release of Mr Ocalan. In their statement, they asserted that Mr Ocalan was "one of the architects of the peace process and must attain his freedom.

They said this step was important for the achievement of a "democratic, honourable and lasting peace".

Meanwhile the Freedom for Ocalan Peace Platform wants to collect 10 million signatures in support of releasing the Kurdish leader. "This is a campaign for peace," said spokeswoman Zubeida Teker. "To free Öcalan would be the biggest contribution to peace".

In Amed and surrounding cities, the BDP plans to collect one million signatures in five days.

For more information on the Human Rights Association press conference, go to <http://www.kurdishinfo.com/ihd-demands-release-ocalan>

For more information on the signature campaign, go to <http://www.kurdishinfo.com/want-10-million-signatures-ocalan-teker>

Or

<http://en.firatnews.com/news/news/bdp-to-gather-a-million-signatures-for-freedom-for-ocalan-in-amed.htm>

Military activity increasing on South Kurdistan border

The Turkish army is continuing to create tension along the border despite the ongoing ceasefire of the Kurdish armed movement and its recent warnings over the increasing military activity of the Turkish army on the border.

Besides the intense activity of military helicopters and warplanes in emdinli region, soldiers in large numbers are being deployed to reinforce border units and F-16 warplanes

are carrying out flights over the regions controlled by the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in Federal Kurdistan Region.

<http://en.firatnews.com/news/news/military-activity-increasing-on-south-kurdistan-border.htm>

Erdogan accuses rival Gulen as new leaked recording emerges

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan last month openly challenged his arch-rival, US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, to return home as their feud deepened with a second leaked recording linking the premier to a corruption scandal.

In his first direct appeal to Gulen, Erdogan said: "If you have not done anything wrong, do not stay in Pennsylvania. If your homeland is Turkey, come back to your homeland."

"If you want to engage in politics, go out to the squares. But do not stir up this country. Do not disturb the peace of this country," he told a boisterous crowd of supporters in the southwestern city of Burdur.

<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/erdogan-accuses-rival-gulen-new-leaked-recording-emerges>

The people involved in producing and broadcasting an alleged recording of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaking

with his son will be prosecuted, according to a senior advisor to the prime minister. That recording has made waves this week, the latest in a string of controversies that have crippled Erdogan's government since a corruption investigation into senior members of his party was launched on December 17.

<http://www.aawsat.net/2014/02/article55329453>

Can Turkey handle free and fair elections?

Since the initiation of the graft probe on December 17, 2013 that forced four ministers to resign and PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan to reshuffle his cabinet, the AKP government has been fervently pushing through laws that have been provoking widespread reactions not only in Turkey but also in Europe and the US.

Taken onto the agenda with unprecedented haste, these changes give sweeping additional powers to government, expanding executive control over key institutions ahead of the crucial elections in 2014.

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/halil-gurhanli/can-turkey-handle-free-and-fair-elections>

[olutionarycommunist.org/index.php/international/3439-rk190214](http://revolutionarycommunist.org/index.php/international/3439-rk190214)

Interns here to help KHRAG

KHRAG has a new intern. His name is Roshhat Sharanshi, He is 20-years old, was born in The Netherlands his family is originally from the South of Kurdistan (Zakho).

He is currently in the third year of law studies at the University of Groningen.

He told KHRAG News: "As a Kurdish guy I was raised in the centre of Kurdistan, my family was involved in the Kurdish struggle during their whole life. So it is no surprise that I ended up at KHRAG with my internship. I hope that I can contribute a lot to the activities of KHRAG during my short internship, which ends in July".



A visiting student from Holland has been assisting KHRAG since the second half of 2013. Aline Jabbari is an exchange student. She studies law at Utrecht University but is in South Africa to do a mixture of law history and anthropology at UWC.

Due to her Kurdish background and her interest in human rights she made contact with KHRAG soon after her arrival in June 2013.

She told KHRAG News: "I wanted to get involved. The Kurdish struggle is one that is often forgotten or looked over by the rest of the world, and it is great to discover such a committed and devoted group of South Africans fighting for the Kurdish cause. I am therefore more than happy to be a part of KHRAG."

THE KURDISH ISSUE IN TURKEY AND SYRIA

THE talks between Abdullah Ocalan and the Turkish government have been overshadowed by the developments in Syria. The international community, through the United Nations, has sponsored the Geneva 11 talks to find a peaceful political solution to the crisis in Syria. The talks are doomed to be still-born because the most important role-players were left out of the process.

The Kurdish people in Syria, which constitute a sizable population of the country, were excluded from the Geneva 11 talks. Because of their exclusion, they have declared self-rule in areas of Syria, which they controlled after the Syrian government withdrew its forces from the area in question. This course of conduct was dictated by their exclusion from the peace process. The South African peace process was successful because it was an all-inclusive process in which all role-players participated.

The tripartite talks between the Turkish Government, Ocalan and the Kurdish BDP opposition parliamentary party are continuing. There are certain elements within the security establishment of Turkey who are trying to sabotage the talks as in the case in South Africa.

This has resulted in AK Party distancing itself from these elements which had



Kurds protest after the killing of three women activists in Paris in January last year

entrenched itself in certain security structures. The Turkish government has started dismissing these elements in order to curtail their activities.

A report in Des Spiegel a respected newspaper in Germany has reported that there is evidence that links certain elements of the security establishment in Turkey with the assassination of the three Kurdish activists in Paris on 9 January 2013. The report says that the target was Sakine Cansiz, a founding member of PKK. The other two activists, Fidan

Dogan and Leyla Saylemez, the paper claims happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. One person, namely Omer Guney, is presently being accused of their murder and held in custody in Paris.

It is not likely that much progress will be made with the talks until after the local government elections, which are to take place on 30 March 2014. Most of the political parties are now involved in election campaigns for...

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Mandela was a shining star - Ocalan

► by Havin Guneser

EVEN in their deaths, some continue to remind us to consider and reflect on long-standing issues. Nelson Mandela has passed, but the values he stood for remain.

I arrived in South Africa shortly after Mandela's death, as part of a four person Kurdish delegation. We had been tasked to bring condolence messages from Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish people imprisoned in an island prison since 1999.

Ocalan was extremely affected by the death of Nelson Mandela and had asked for his message and flowers to be delivered to Mandela's family, comrades and the people of South Africa.

Our delegation consisted of Mr Tahir Kamalazadeh, Co-President of the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK), Mr Nazmi Gür, MP from Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), Mr Ertugrul Kürkcü, MP and Co-President of People's Democracy Party (HDP), and myself.

We came to pay tribute to a genuine leader who not only led his people in a successful struggle against apartheid, but who also stood consistently in solidarity with oppressed peoples worldwide, including the Kurds.

In his tribute to Mandela, Ocalan said: "The heartfelt dedication and friendship with him was mutual. His sensitivity and dedication to the Kurdish people fostered deep respect and dedication in our hearts for him. He was a shining star that enlightened the peoples of Africa. We are determined to have that star shine on the people of the Middle East," said Mr Ocalan.

In 1993, Mandela rejected without any hesitation the [Turkish] Atatürk International Peace Prize because of the oppression of the Kurdish people in Turkey.

It was as a result of the deep respect for Mandela, that Ocalan headed to South Africa in 1999, to seek the then South African president's support for the resolution of the Kurdish question.

This was never to happen, since on the way Öcalan was abducted from Kenya in an international act of piracy and handed over to the Turkish officials.

During our visit in South Africa we experienced amazing support and warmth wherever we went. All doors were opened to us when people learned we were representing Abdullah Öcalan and the Kurdish people.

We visited the Houghton home of Mandela where we were received by Dumani

Mandela. We were able to convey Ocalan's and the Kurdish people's condolence messages personally to Graça Machel and the larger family. I want to sincerely thank the members of KHRAG, the SACP, Cosatu and the ANC for their incredible support. Through their efforts, we were able to attend the memorial services at the Stadium and at Waterkloof Air Base as well as the emotional funeral in Qunu.

I would like to conclude by sharing another excerpt from Ocalan's message. It reads:

"The other side of the grief that we are feeling today is the joy in the faces of his people who have gained freedom together, and the blow that they dealt to the rulers. The fist that rose in South Africa became the fist of all oppressed people....The great legacy that Mandela left to all of us is never to surrender, not in prison, not even in the most difficult moments. Our big family should not bow its head as we say farewell to one of our wisest, one that never bowed his head. Amicable greetings to the people of South Africa and all oppressed who see a comrade in Mandela!"

Havin Guneser works for the International Initiative Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan"

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the local government elections.

The Turkish government has agreed to send a delegation of journalists from certain influential Turkish newspapers and certain members of the Wise-men Commission to have talks with Ocalan to get certain assur-

ances from him on the peace process and be briefed by the delegation on the public responses to the peace process. This appears to be a positive move on the part of the Government.

However, the government has not moved on other key issues such as the release of

political prisoners and the scrapping of anti-terror legislation which is widely used against the Kurds.

It is difficult to know where the peace process is going, but KHRAG hopes that it will gain some momentum after the local government elections.



KHRAG has been hosting a series of fundraisers called Moon over Mesopotamia to raise much needed funds for the organisation. The initiatives are spearheaded by Beverli Joffe, pictured, and a team of supporters. The last event took place in February and more are planned.

KHRAG ATTENDS SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE

THE South African Parliament held a solidarity conference in support of Palestine, Western Sahara and Cuba on 6 February 2014.

It was held in the parliamentary chamber. The chairperson of KHRAG, Judge Essa Moosa, attended the conference as guest of Western Sahara. The conference was attended by approximately 150 persons who comprised representatives of Palestine, Western Sahara, Cuba and a number of NGOs.

The solidarity conference was the first of its kind in the South African Parliament. It was in response to calls by President Jacob Zuma in his State of the Nation address.

The focus of the Conference was to make the people of South Africa aware of the struggle of the peoples of Western Sahara, Palestine and Cuba in connection with human rights violations and the right to self-determination as oppressed people.

Ahmed Kathrada spoke about the campaign for the release of Palestinian political prisoners which was recently launched from

Robben Island. It had a powerful symbolic meaning. It linked the release of the Palestinian prisoners with that of the release of the Robben Island prisoners, The Cuban Ambassador spoke about the Cuban Five prisoners held in the United States who were unlawfully convicted in a mistrial. Despite the fact that a court in 2005 overturned the convictions of the Five, the appeal court reinstated the convictions.

What emerged from the Conference is that the struggle of the Western Sahara people for the right to self-determination and independence is closer to home but we in South Africa have very little knowledge of those peoples struggle.

Since the western colonial powers exited Western Sahara, part of its territory has been occupied by Morocco. The Saharawi people embarked on an armed struggle spearheaded by the Polisario Front.

In the 1990s the United Nations brokered a peace deal between Saharawi people and

Morocco. In term of such a deal, the armed struggle was suspended and a referendum was to be held by the Saharawi people in order to exercise their right to self-determination.

Morocco has frustrated such right. There are thousands of refugees in camps in Algeria, in the occupied territory of Western Sahara and elsewhere. Hundreds of political prisoners are held in Morocco and in the occupied territory.

Kurdish Human rights Action Group (KHRAG) supports the right of the Saharawi and Palestinian people to self-determination and independence.

It also supports the right of the Cuban people to live in peace with their neighbours and exercise their sovereignty as a nation without any hindrance or impediment from their powerful neighbour, the United States. It furthermore calls for the unconditional release of the Cuban Five prisoners who were convicted in an unfair trial.



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