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14 November 2018

Mr Donald Trump  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington DC 20500 USA

Dear President Trump,

Kurdish Lobby Australia would like to thank you and the United States of America for supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the war against ISIS in eastern Syria. Kurds and their supporters around the world appreciate that without US-led coalition support, the SDF, the Syrian Democratic Council, and the local administrations of Manbij, Raqqa, Tabqa and Deir Ezzor would have been unable to achieve ethnic and religious inclusivity, and relative peace and stability in Syria.

A major challenge for the U.S. is that Turkey, Iran, Russia and the Assad regime oppose the support that the U.S. and its allies are providing in eastern Syria. In late October – early November, Turkey launched unprovoked attacks on north east Syria. President Erdogan repeatedly threatens to ‘eliminate’ all Syrian Kurdish fighters. These very same fighters are dying in a four-year war against ISIS. Turkey’s attacks and threats impede the fight against ISIS (the SDF withdrew from the front after recent attacks), and endanger the lives of American forces and civilians. Turkey justifies these attacks and threats by claiming the People’s Protection Units (YPG), the SDF and the Democratic Union Party (PYD) are a threat to Turkey’s national security, alleging they are Syrian extensions of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). But Syrian Kurds do not pose a military threat to Turkey. Rather, Turkey fears that if Syrian Kurds and their allies achieve a federal democracy in Syria, then Kurds in Turkey will become more determined to achieve the same. This may not be a bad thing. If Turkey became a federal democracy like the U.S. and Australia, it might become a more stable and reliable ally.

Kurds in Turkey and Syria have been killed, displaced and neglected for more than 100 years. Enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence is the right of people to rise up against an unjust government, as did Americans in the War of Independence. In those times, the word ‘terrorist’ was not used. Instead, the British claimed that the Americans did not fight like ‘gentlemen’. Kurds of Turkey have similarly stood against Turkish state oppression, the most recent manifestation being the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state since 1984.

In 2013, the Turkish government entered into a bilateral ceasefire and began negotiations with the PKK, but these efforts broke down in June 2015, after the electoral success of the pro-Kurdish

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People's Democratic Party (HDP) prevented President Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) from winning a parliamentary majority. Since then, armed conflict between the Turkish state and PKK has caused the destruction of Kurdish-majority towns and a massive displacement of people, with the conflict spilling over into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and Turkey invading and occupying the Azaz – Jarablus – al-Bab triangle and the Kurdish-majority district of Afrin in Syria.

Currently the U.S. and many of its allies list the PKK as a terrorist organization despite PKK advocating human, cultural and political rights for Kurds and all people in Turkey. Countries that list the PKK as a terrorist organisation have based their listing on often unverified 'information' supplied by Turkish authorities, the very same authorities that produced 'evidence' which put an American citizen, Pastor Andrew Brunson, an honourable man of peace and God, behind bars for two years on spurious evidence that caused him to be charged and convicted of terrorism and conspiracy. The evidence that PKK is a terrorist organization is no more reliable.

According to the U.S. Department of State, the legal criteria for a foreign terrorist organization [are](#):

“The organization must be a foreign organization; the organization engages in terrorist activity or terrorism or retains the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity or terrorism; and the terrorist activity or terrorism of the organization threatens the security of United States nationals or the national security of the United States.”

We understand that, in order to be listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO), the Secretary of State must ascertain that an organization meets all three conditions. If the Secretary of State wishes to revoke a FTO designation, s/he must verify changes in the circumstances, which previously formed the basis for the designation.

Regarding Clause 2, in September 2017 a [Belgian Court of Appeal](#), and in March 2018, the [Permanent People's Tribunal](#) (PPT) in Rome, ruled that the PKK was a political-military organisation engaged in armed conflict with the Turkish state and therefore subject to international humanitarian law in the Geneva Conventions and subsequent protocols, as opposed to national criminal law or anti-terror laws. PKK admits, and apologises for, civilian collateral damage in its actions against Turkish security forces. In contrast, the Turkish state systematically targets and kills civilians, far more in number than any collateral damage caused by PKK, including 178 unarmed Kurdish civilians who were hiding in basements during the Turkish military's 100-day siege of Cizre in February 2016. The victims were shot and their bodies burned beyond recognition before the buildings were bulldozed. According to the Permanent People's Tribunal, this and other actions constitute war crimes, for which the Turkish state has not undertaken or allowed any independent investigation. The PPT also refers to war crimes committed by the

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Turkish state against Kurds in Afrin. These war crimes include ongoing massive displacement of civilians, kidnapping, killing and torture, looting, and confiscation of property.

Regarding Clause 3, PKK has not intentionally targeted U.S. nationals and has not threatened the security of the United States. One would have to go back to 1993 and 1995 to find that on two occasions PKK activities in Turkey caused a threat to U.S. nationals, although no one was killed. Since 2014, PKK has been instrumental in fighting ISIS and protecting Yezidis in Sinjar in northern Iraq. PKK advocates a democratic confederalism model of government based on the non-violent secularist ideas of an American political theorist, Murray Bookchin, and has repeatedly requested the U.S. mediate peace talks. In contrast, agents of Turkey attacked and injured U.S. citizens in Washington in May 2017, an American citizen and two U.S. consular staff continue to be held in Turkish prisons on fabricated charges, and the Turkish military and its Syrian proxies now threaten the lives of Americans in northern Syria.

We understand that Turkey is an important U.S. ally because of its geostrategic position and NATO membership. However, Turkey's trajectory has become increasingly Islamist, autocratic and erratic under President Erdogan. Hence, whilst most, if not all, American political leaders preceding you have appeased Turkey, your courage and decisive action in imposing tariffs on some Turkish products secured the release of innocent Pastor Brunson. For that you have our utmost respect and admiration.

The Kurds have been a staunch ally of the United States in 1990 – 1991, 2003, and in the war against ISIS, but few Americans know about their ancestors' historical contribution to the writing of the American Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Cyrus the Great, known for allowing captive Jews in Babylon to return to Israel in 539 BCE, was the first king of a Medo-Persian empire, himself half Mede, half Persian, and descended from Mede kings. Kurds consider the Medes to be their ancestors. Cyrus ruled a vast empire that extended from Cyprus and Libya to Afghanistan. He allowed freedom of religion and created the world's first unity of states in which different ethnicities, cultures and religions were equal before the law, much as the U.S. is to-day. Cyrus structured the empire's administration as if it was an army with each region being given a level of military, economic and political autonomy, provided the ruler or 'fellow guardian' accepted and fulfilled certain conditions. In modern language it would be called a confederation. After studying Xenophon's account of Cyrus's rule in *Cyropaedia*, Thomas Jefferson wrote the American Declaration of Independence and made suggestions for the U.S. Constitution. The writers of the constitution decided to adopt a confederation model with the intention of maintaining national unity over a large area and to avoid tyranny. In the twenty-first century, is it not time to give Kurds something in return?

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If Turkey could be convinced to make peace with Kurds in and outside Turkey, all parties would benefit, including U.S. interests in Syria and Iraq. One incentive for Turkey to make peace would be the U.S. de-listing the PKK as a terrorist organization on condition PKK ends its armed struggle, and the Turkish state embarks on internationally monitored political negotiations with Kurdish representatives. Such a move would demonstrate the U.S.' capacity for leadership on the world stage. Just as the Turkish state and Turkish companies have benefited from a relatively stable semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq since 2005, after fiercely opposing its formation, the Turkish state would benefit from a more stable northern and eastern Syria, in which Turkish (and U.S.) construction companies could have a role in reconstruction. Hence, Kurdish Lobby Australia asks that the US State Department and other relevant authorities consider the merits of de-listing the PKK as a terrorist organization, and in the meantime, continue to protect Syrian Kurds and their allies, Christians included, from outside aggression.

Yours Sincerely,

Eziz Bawermend, President/Co-Chair

Dr Gina Lennox, Public Officer, Co-chair

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