

# Foreword

by Madame Danielle Mitterrand

The Kurds and I have a long history. We have memories in common which our relationship and joint histories are founded upon.

They have confidence in my initiatives for peace because they know my persistence in convincing people that they have a right to their own place on our earth, in the same way as those who have appropriated it do.

Thus, for more than fifteen years, I have taken every opportunity to alert not only French but also European and international public opinion to the injustice done to the Kurdish people. The United Nations Human Rights Commission, the European Parliament, the US Congress, my Nobel Peace Prize friends, heads of state and governments have all heard me speak about the Kurds.

What can we do for the Kurds, divided between four countries, continually in conflict, so that they can live in peace and justice with their compatriots: Turks, Arabs, Iranians and others?

I think that our role is to have the legitimacy of Kurdish cultural, civic and political claims recognised in the countries in which they live. It is no longer acceptable, under the pretext of not interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states, to close our eyes to the massive violations of the rights of Kurds, while declaring our duty to help people in danger, *peoples* in danger.

Representatives of civil society and public opinion, we also have a role in denouncing civil wars, massacres, the destruction of villages and massive deportations carried out by sovereign states against their own populations. It is our responsibility as citizens of this planet to demand that our leaders act in such a way as to bring the warring parties around to dialogue and a peaceful solution.

It is regrettable to note that in Turkey, generals continue to lead the *danse macabre* of a deadly armed conflict and refuse to consider a political and peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem. They are forever brandishing the spectre of war against a population which is only seeking recognition of its existence and its legitimate rights. Under the pretext of fighting "terrorism", they maintain a state of seige in the Kurdish region, destroying villages and obliging the population to flee. They lose no opportunity of stifling any democratic demands. The Kurdish democratically elected representatives are rotting in prison. The decision of the European Court of Human Rights which declared their trials unfair, has not changed in any way the fact that these representatives continue to remain in prison, while our European governments, members of the European Council, intervene on their behalf. Also, the Turkish army, in spite of international laws, violates Iraqi borders, while pursuing Kurds who have found refuge in that country. In doing so, it breaks the conventions and international agreements it has signed.

In Iraq, where for more than ten years, part of the Kurdish region has been under the control of the UN, the Kurds are no longer subjected to extermination campaigns led by the Iraqi regime of the 1980s. They have rebuilt their villages, but continue to live in terror and fear of the return of their persecutors. Is it necessary to remind people of the Anfal campaigns, of the chemical and biological gassings carried out against the Kurdish population?

In Iraq, weakened by a decade of economic sanctions, which strike at the most disadvantaged and weakest sectors of the population, the desire to rid the country of Kurds, is the political backdrop of Saddam Hussein's regime. In allowing terror and insecurity to rule, it is encouraging, if not inciting, the people to choose exodus.

In the current context of the globalisation of economies, finance and communication, it is time to install a global justice so that dictators, and all those responsible for crimes against humanity, may be brought before an international criminal court, which would have the means to render justice. Thus, Saddam Hussein, and the like, would suffer a check to their destructive excesses, and the states which support and arm them receive a reminder of their duty to establish peace.

The Kurds of Iran have also suffered political repression since 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The Kurdish political parties are outlawed and exiled. Their pacifist leaders have been assassinated in Europe. An acceptable solution to the Kurdish problem in that country, negotiated by Kurdish representatives and Iranian leaders, is possible, on the basis of a real international political and democratic will.

The Kurds in Syria have no cultural rights and cannot fulfil their civic responsibilities if they declare their ethnic origin. Like everywhere in Kurdistan, the Kurdish region in Syria remains underdeveloped. The Kurds in this country demand recognition of their cultural rights and the return of those people expelled from their land during the 1960s.

So what can we do? Close our eyes in the name of economic and financial imperatives to the atrocities committed in the region against a civilian population, living on its own territory, but deprived of its most basic rights? Isn't it time to choose moral firmness in which the advantages are indisputable under any circumstance? Shouldn't we establish the means to achieve a peaceful solution acceptable to everyone?

Shouldn't Europe, which instigated the division of the Kurdish region, take the necessary measures so that in the absence of their own state, the Kurds have the possibility to live in liberty and democracy, with respect for their cultural traditions, in peace with themselves and with the peoples around them?

The Kurdish problem is part of a worldwide movement of solidarity in resistance to commercial forces, which do not hesitate to exploit the possessions they buy with investment dollars, to the detriment of native populations and with the complicity of governments. The weight of market policy and free trade rules allow for every kind of compromise up to the abandonment of the defence of human rights, the basis of democratic European constitutions. Yet the conventional discourse has hardly changed over the years, despite the information and denunciations of NGO humanitarian field workers.

Europe no longer has confidence in itself. It will become mature when it learns to

speak with a single voice to declare that its European policy is not subject to imperatives imposed on it by a global imperialism which becomes even more threatening when it feels itself challenged. Consequently, at the signing of trade agreements, Europe contents itself with a democracy clause, alibi for its good conscience, but invokes the right not to interfere before sending the issue back to the warring parties. This attitude has been interpreted by many European citizens as an act of cowardice.

Parliamentarians more in tune with public opinion respond to these injustices, but it is governments that have the final say in deciding the overall policy to follow, and the influence of their most persuasive means to ensure that the peace process is established in countries where the Kurds live, particularly in Turkey.

In 1999, the main Kurdish armed resistance movement in Turkey decided to put an end to the armed struggle, and become a political organisation which achieves

6 as its aims through political and peaceful methods. It is the start of an encouraging evolution which should be taken into consideration. We should help Kurdish political movements to begin a dialogue with the leaders of their countries and to come to a democratic and peaceful solution, even more now that Turkey is an official candidate for entry into the European Union.

Finding a political and peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem now is necessary more than ever. We have a large population, with a very high birth rate, living in an area which has the largest reserves of water in the region. Peace in the whole region will be determined by peace and stability in the territories inhabited by Kurds depend on peace in the whole region.

Optimistic and confident about the future, I believe that the Kurdish problem, outstripping its regional framework, has become a European, indeed a global problem. Therefore it would be best dealt with by the international community. Certainly, a recognition of Kurdish cultural rights by the regimes involved, even more in Turkey than in Iraq, Iran and Syria, is far from being achieved, but the Kurds' peaceful struggle continues and peace is their strength.

Almost everywhere in the world, diverse initiatives are increasingly promoting awareness. *Fire, Snow and Honey: Voices from Kurdistan* is an example. With the aim of tackling all aspects of Kurdish life, the ambition of this book is to act as a living witness of the Kurdish people in the millennium, of their past, but also of their present so that the future can take note.