

25 May 2020

Request for the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to strongly respond to Turkey's human rights abuses in Turkey, Syria and Iraq

Co-signed by the following Australian-based Organisations.



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To: President of Iraq, Barham Salih
KRG President Nechirvan Barzani
KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani
KRG Deputy Prime Minister Qubud Talabani
KRG Minister of Foreign Affairs, Falah Mustafa
KDP President, Masoud Barzani
Iraqi Ambassador, His Excellency, Dr Basim Hattab Altumma
KRG Representative to Australia, Haval Dasko Sayan

Request for the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to strongly respond to Turkey's human rights abuses in Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

As representatives of eight Australian-based organisations we voice our condemnation of Turkey's violation of international law, including its disregard for sovereignty and human rights, in its aggression against Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

We ask the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government to raise Turkey's abuses against Kurds with Turkey's ambassador to Iraq, the Turkish Government and at international forums, and to advocate appropriate multilateral responses. The issues we particularly would appreciate your government to address are as follows.

In Iraq, on 15 April 2020, Turkish drones flew 400 kilometres into Iraqi airspace and bombed Judi Refugee Camp, one kilometre outside the town of Makhmour, in a disputed territory. The airstrikes killed three women: Havva Aydogan (age 22), Azime Aydogan (age 23) and Ayshe Ahmed Ferhan (age 17). This was the fourth time since December 2017 that Turkey had conducted illegal air [strikes](#) on this refugee camp of 12,000 residents. It was Turkey's second strike on the camp in 2020, and not the last. Each time, civilians have been killed and/or injured. Camp residents are Kurdish refugees from Turkey, many having left eastern Turkey during Turkey's military offensives in 1994, others escaping since then.

Then there is Turkey's offensive called [Operation Claw](#) against the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK, which involves fighter jets, helicopters and drones attacking targets in Sinjar (another disputed territory, infamous for an ISIS' genocide of Yezidi in 2014), Qandil and surrounding areas in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and launching ground offensives from ['dozens' of forward operating bases](#) in Nineveh and Dohuk, all guided by Turkey's intelligence agents (MIT). The stated intention of Operation Claw is to 'neutralise' all PKK militants in Iraq, but Turkey's actions have also killed more than two dozen Iraqi Kurd civilians and caused the evacuation of some 350 villages. It is our understanding that the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government have repeatedly asked Turkey to stop these offensives, but Turkey takes no notice.

Firstly, we hope you see the importance of providing a safe environment for those from other countries or regions who seek asylum from persecution in Iraq. Secondly, we look forward to you gathering international support to convince Turkey to respect the sovereignty of Iraq by withdrawing its military bases and ground forces, and ceasing all unauthorised infringements of Iraq's airspace.

In Syria, Turkey's invasion and occupation of three districts has resulted in Turkey's army and its Syrian militia proxies in the miss-named Syrian National Army committing war [crimes](#) and crimes against humanity. These crimes include the ethnic cleansing of Kurds and others, whose homes and businesses are being taken over by Turkey's Syrian mercenaries and their families from other parts of Syria. Another major crime is Turkey overseeing the regular stopping of a water pumping station for many days at a time, thus denying water to more than 400,000 [people](#). Turkey's invasions and occupations of the Euphrates Shield Triangle, Afrin, Tel Abyad, Ras al-Ain, Tel Tamr and surrounding villages have brought extreme violence to these areas. Turkey's mercenaries are kidnapping people for ransom, torturing people in prisons or unknown locations, and forcing young women into marriage by kidnapping them or threatening their families. Turkey-armed militias are fighting each other on a daily basis over territory, loot, houses, the right to exhort taxes and so on, partly because they are not receiving a regular salary. Turkey's drones, and the actions of its army and Syrian proxies go well beyond any agreement with either the US or Russia, and are the outcome of President Erdogan's [stated intention](#) of ridding north Syria of Kurdish 'terrorists'. Under this label are all Kurds, Christians, Sunni Arabs and others who support the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and the Syrian Democratic Forces. Since Turkey's occupation of these areas, terrorist attacks have become more frequent, as recently seen in Afrin, [Al-Bab](#) and Ras al-Ain. On April 28, a particularly horrific incident occurred in the centre of Afrin city. An IED exploded inside a fuel tanker in a crowded market killing at least [52 people](#) and injuring another 50, most being civilian. Immediately following the explosion, in the midst of the carnage, Turkey's Syrian mercenaries began looting damaged shops, and fighting each other over the loot, instead of finding the [perpetrators](#). Each time one of these attacks takes place, Turkey immediately blames Kurdish 'terrorist' Peoples' Defence Units (YPG) without any investigation, despite Turkey's Syrian mercenaries having abundant grievances with Turkey over not being paid for months at a [time](#) and being forcibly recruited to fight another war in Libya.

For the aforementioned crimes, we ask you to push for independent investigations to find and prosecute the perpetrators and their commanders. If Turkey refuses to allow impartial parties to carry out investigations, it would indicate Turkey has something to hide. We call on you to use international forums and multilateral means to convince Turkey that it is in its best interest to withdraw from Syria and cease supporting Islamist extremists in Syria, that a multilateral enforced safe zone and peace-keeping force would ensure Turkey's security. These and other recommendations are contained in Kurdish Lobby Australia's report '[Turkey in Syria](#)' (Lennox, April 2020). These calls have also been made by Syrian Democratic Force Commander-in-Chief, General Mazloum Abdi [Kobani](#), [Kurdish organisations](#) and the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom](#).

In Turkey, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) former co-chair and two-times presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas, is among seven former HDP parliamentarians who have been in prison for 3.5 years, some yet to face sentencing, most on the basis of having made speeches critical of the actions and/or policies of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan or another Turkish authority. The Turkish President's Office is currently requesting the Turkish parliament lift immunity on another [21 HDP parliamentarians](#). Since the March 2019 municipal elections, the state has refused 14 elected HDP mayors their elected office and has dismissed another [40 HDP mayors](#) from office out of 97 elected HDP mayors in 65 municipalities. (Numerical discrepancies are due to HDP appointing male and female co-mayors.) Government appointed trustees now run 45 of these municipalities. At least 21 dismissed mayors are in [prison](#). Many were dismissed for speaking against Turkey's invasion of northeast Syria in 2019.

In addition to raising these issues at appropriate forums, we ask you to consider appropriate measures until all current and former elected representatives are released from prison and, where appropriate, reinstated to their elected position, unless they have been convicted of one or more internationally recognised crimes.

In Conclusion, Kurds have come a long way since 1991, yet the more political and military status Kurds gain the more determined Turkey becomes in destroying these achievements, as recently seen in what is happening in [Zini Warte](#). Just when the Kurd-led political parties in northern Syria are in the process of [reconciling](#), and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq is helping the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria to meet the challenges of the coronavirus and Turkey's invasion by sending [medical and](#) other humanitarian aid, and accepting displaced [people](#), Turkey is using every Machiavellian tactic to create a civil war between PKK, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) at [Zini Warte](#). Turkey's actions are creating an environment of [insecurity](#) that has multiple ramifications.

These matters demonstrate that Kurdish issues cannot be solved militarily and are international in nature. We ask you to encourage and facilitate international endeavours to convince the Turkish state to withdraw military forces from Iraq and Syria, refrain from military offensives against Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, and to sincerely enter political negotiations with the PKK, HDP and other stakeholders in Turkey, and the Syrian Democratic Council, Syrian Democratic Forces and other institutions in north and east Syria to establish constructive relations and a lasting peace between the Turkish state and Kurds in and outside Turkey.