

## **To the Honourable Members and Senators of the Parliament of Australia**

The attached statement marks the centenary of the Treaty of Sevres, signed on 10 August 1920. The statement is supported by nine Australian-based organisations. It describes how the Treaty of Sevres proposed a nation state called Kurdistan. Australia was a signatory to this Treaty, which had international support, unlike the Treaty of Lausanne three years later, which signed Kurdistan out of existence. As Australia was not a signatory to the Treaty of Lausanne, Australia should still honour the Treaty of Sevres.

Our statement quotes the relevant sections of the Treaty of Sevres and the UN Charter (1945). It describes why Kurds were unsuccessful in getting a nation state largely because they were convinced by Ataturk's promise of self-governance, which did not eventuate. The statement shows that just as Kemal outmanoeuvred Kurdish leaders in the 1920s, so today the Turkish state is the chief obstacle and aggressor against Kurds' progress towards self-determination in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. In the Islamic Republic of Iran the government also denies political and cultural self-determination for ethnic and religious minorities.

On a related but more universal matter, given that Turkey is turning away from democracy and judicial independence, and has opened up multiple war fronts in the Middle East and north Africa and is threatening to open more, in June 2020, we were dismayed to learn that Mr Volkan Bozkir, a Turkish politician from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), was the sole candidate put forward by the UN to be the President of the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly. Mr Bozkir supports President Erdogan's policies regarding:

- Politically convenient definitions of terrorism, these being used to dismiss and imprison elected Kurdish parliamentarians, mayors and municipal councillors;
- The invasion and occupation of Kurd-majority lands in Syria resulting in the ethnic cleansing of the Kurdish population; and
- Turkey's disregard for the sovereignty of Iraq, etc..

Naturally, as the sole candidate, he was elected president of the UN General Assembly.

It is a blight on the UN to even have allowed Mr Bozkir to stand for this position. As he was elected through a secret ballot, we do not know which three countries returned invalid votes and which 11 countries abstained. We sincerely hope that Australia was among those invalid votes or abstentions.

Whether or not Australia voted for Mr Bozkir, we ask Australian representatives to raise Turkey's treatment of Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iraq in its speech at the General Assembly. We understand Greece, Cyprus and Armenia opposed the initial proposal that Mr Bozkir be appointed without an election, and may therefore be among the invalid votes or abstentions. Australia could approach these and other countries to coordinate an effort to resolve the matters raised in the attached statement.

Otherwise, we would greatly appreciate you raising these matters in parliament, at meetings, in interviews, on social media and in other ways that you communicate with your constituents and the world. It would be truly wonderful if Australia could take some lead gathering support for appropriate actions in accordance with the UN Charter in relation to people living in the Kurdistan regions when working to retain the liberal international order.

Yours Sincerely,

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**Kurdish Lobby Australia**

10 August 2020

**On the 100-year anniversary of the Treaty of Sèvres that proposed a nation state called Kurdistan, we request the Australian Government, which is currently represented on the UN Human Rights Council, to bring the right of self-determination for Kurds and other people in the Kurdistan Regions of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey to the attention of the relevant UN agencies in accordance with the UN Charter, Chapter 1, Article 1, Point 2.**

Co-signed by the following Australian-based Organisations.



**Kurdish Lobby Australia**



**SYDNEY KURDISH YOUTH SOCIETY**



**10 August 2020 is the centenary of the signing of the [Treaty of Sevres](#). Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I the Treaty proposed the creation of new nation states, and prioritised the need to protect ethnic and religious minority rights in those states. Australia was one of the [signatories](#). The clauses most relevant for Kurds and Kurdistan are as follows.**

A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27, II (2) and (3). If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the Commission to their respective Governments. The scheme shall contain full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas, and with this object a Commission composed of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives shall visit the spot to examine and decide what rectifications, if any, should be made in the Turkish frontier where, under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia. (KURDISTAN SECTION III ARTICLE 62)

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas. (KURDISTAN SECTION III ARTICLE 64)

The proposed state of Kurdistan would cover southeast Turkey and northern Iraq. (See map at the end of this statement). In Section 1 the Treaty states:

‘In the event of Turkey failing to observe faithfully the provisions of the present Treaty, or of any treaties or conventions supplementary thereto, particularly as regards the protection of the rights of racial, religious or linguistic minorities, the Allied Powers expressly reserve the right to modify the above provisions, and Turkey hereby agrees to accept any dispositions which may be taken in this connection. ... (POLITICAL CLAUSES, SECTION I, CONSTANTINOPLE, ARTICLE 36)

The Ottoman sultan signed the treaty. However, in April 1920, Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) had been elected president of an alternative nationalist government. On coming to power Kemal rejected the Treaty of Sèvres, negotiated with [Russia](#) to regain control of Anatolia, and promised Kurds [self-governance](#) within Turkey. This promise convinced enough Kurdish leaders to join Turkey rather than support a British protectorate called Kurdistan.

But Kemal did not deliver on his promise of self-governance. Betrayed Kurdish leaders led rebellions against the Turkish state in 1925 and 1927. Both rebellions were harshly squashed. Hereon, the Kurdish identity was [outlawed](#). It became illegal to speak Kurdish, give Kurdish names to children, villages and towns, or identify as a Kurd. Kurds continued to rebel and continued to be massacred, most recently in the 1990s and 2015 – 2016.

For the last 100 years Turkey has acted outside all international law and human rights law. Just as Kemal prevented a nation state of Kurdistan in 1923, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his government are trying to undermine the achievements of Kurds in three out of four countries in which they live: Turkey, Syria and Iraq. The governments of Iran, Iraq and Syria are also denying Kurds the right to political, cultural and/or economic self-determination. Despite this impacting more than 40 million Kurds and others in the Kurdish majority regions, the international community remains silent. In doing so the international community is not upholding the [UN Charter](#), specifically Chapter 1, Article 1, Point 2. This refers to the purpose of the United Nations being:

To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.

And similarly, Chapter IX, Article 55:

With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well being, which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the UN shall promote:

- a. Higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development;
- b. Solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; and
- c. universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

This year is both the 100-year anniversary of the Treaty of Sevres and the 75-year anniversary of the United Nations, as well as a time when Australia is represented on the UN Human Rights Council. As such, we ask Australian parliamentarians and representatives of other relevant authorities to uphold the rights specified in the UN Charter and voice their condemnation of the ongoing violations of international law and humanitarian law, whether in Turkey's military and political aggression against Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iraq; Iran's denial of political, cultural and economic rights to Kurds, including the execution of Kurdish political prisoners and the military, economic and political actions and threats posed by the Syrian and Iraqi governments on their Kurdistan regions. Parliamentarians can speak up in parliament, meetings and interviews, on social media or in advocacy on the world stage, as can representatives of other authorities.

Given that multiple military offensives against Kurds in the last 100 years have not quelled Kurds' quest for self-determination we ask all interested authorities to work towards a political solution to save 40 million or more Kurds and others in the Kurdistan regions from another century of oppression and suffering. We propose this to be the minimum the

international community can do in return for Kurds in Iraq and Syria having sacrificed so much in fighting ISIS, on behalf of themselves, but also the world. The issues that support our position, and which urgently need to be addressed are as follows.

**In Iraq**, Turkey's drones, fighter jets, helicopters and ground forces that operate from ['dozens' of forward operating bases](#) guided by Turkey's intelligence are attacking the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the disputed territory of Sinjar (where ISIS committed genocide on the Yezidi population), and Judy Refugee camp in the disputed territory of [Makhmour](#) (where one airstrike killed three women aged 17 to 23). The most recent offensives started in April under the names of [Operation Claw](#) Eagle/Tiger with the alleged intention to target the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). But Turkey's actions have killed at least two dozen Iraqi Kurd civilians, damaged infrastructure and livelihoods, and caused the evacuation of some 350 villages. Turkey's stated intention is to create a ['buffer zone'](#) like it has done in Syria! It is our understanding that the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government have repeatedly asked Turkey to stop these offensives and remove its bases, but Turkey takes no notice. The GoI is contemplating sanctions on Turkey and on [July 6](#) wrote a letter to the UN Security Council requesting it take steps to stop Turkey's military incursions that violate Iraq's sovereignty. There has been no [response](#). It appears the UN is once again failing to act in support of international law.

In addition to Turkey's aggression, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq suffers from escalating pressure and neglect from the GoI. The GoI is not implementing the constitution, including Article 140 that stipulates the process in which to resolve the status of the disputed territories. From 2014 until March 2018, the GoI withheld the Kurdistan Region's allocated revenue, even while Peshmerga defended northern Iraq from ISIS after Iraqi security forces fled. In 2020, the GoI is again economically boycotting the Kurdistan Region. In addition, after the Kurdistan Regional Government held a non-binding referendum on independence in September 2017, the Iraqi and Iranian governments launched military offensives under the command of Quds Force General Qassem Soleimani, to take back control of the disputed territories. Iraq and Iran fully intended to invade the Kurdistan Region itself but was stopped from doing so by US-led negotiations. Since then the GoI has been re-Arabisising Kirkuk and other disputed territories. The international community remains silent.

**In Syria**, Turkey's invasion and occupation of the Euphrates Shield Triangle, Afrin, Tel Abyad, Ras al-Ain and surrounding villages has resulted in Turkey's army and Turkey's Syrian Islamist proxies committing war [crimes](#) and crimes against humanity. These crimes include regularly denying water to more than 400,000 [people](#) and the ethnic cleansing of Kurds and others from these areas with Turkey's proxies confiscating homes, businesses and farms; kidnapping people for ransom; torturing people in unknown locations or prisons; and forcing young women into 'marriage', much like ISIS. Turkey seems to have no control over its mercenaries, who fight each other on a daily basis over territory, property, loot, the right to exhort taxes and so on. Turkey's crimes in Syria have been well documented by the United Nations, Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and US congressional committees. In north east Syria, the actions of Turkey's air force, army and proxies go well beyond agreements made with the US or Russia, and are the outcome of President Erdogan's [stated intention](#) of ridding north Syria of Kurdish 'terrorists'. This label appears to cover all Kurds, including politicians and health workers, Christians, Yezidi, Sunni Arabs and others who support the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) and the Syrian Democratic

Forces. For more information see Kurdish Lobby Australia's report '[Turkey in Syria](#)' (Lennox, April 2020), a statement by Syrian Democratic Force Commander-in-Chief, General Mazloum Abdi [Kobani](#), and Reports by [Kurdish organisations](#) and the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom](#). But the international community fails to act.

In addition to Turkey's aggression, the government of Bashar Al-Assad insists on returning the governance of Syria to the pre – 2011 status quo that denied Kurds fundamental rights, including citizenship to 200,000+ Kurds. The Syrian Government demands total capitulation. If not, it claims it will take the AANES administered region by military force. The sad irony is that after Turkey invaded northeast Syria in October 2019, the Syrian Arab Army reached a Russian mediated agreement with the Kurd-led Syrian Democratic Forces to return to some places in northeast Syria to prevent Turkey expanding its occupation.

**In Turkey**, the Erdogan government is attacking any semblance of democracy and judicial independence. The government declared war on the PKK in July 2015, implementing a state of emergency largely because the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) won 80 seats in parliament. The former HDP co-chair and two-times presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas, is among seven former HDP parliamentarians who have been dismissed from parliament and imprisoned since November 2016. The spurious charges they face are mostly based on them having made speeches critical of the actions and/or policies of President Erdogan and his government. After the March 2019 municipal elections, in which 65 municipalities elected the HDP candidate as mayor, the state refused 14 elected HDP mayors their office and has since dismissed another 45 elected mayors. Government-appointed trustees now run [47 municipalities](#) that voted for HDP. At least 21 dismissed mayors are in [prison](#). The majority are being charged with 'making terrorist propaganda' and 'belonging to a terrorist organisation (PKK) because they spoke out against Turkey's invasion of northeast Syria. Most have yet had their charges tested in court, although this does not ensure justice in Turkey.

**In Iran**, Kurds are discriminated against in education, employment and political representation. They can receive lengthy prison sentences for teaching their mother tongue in a private [language centre](#), for belonging to an outlawed [political, environmental or cultural organisation](#), or for protesting in the street or otherwise speaking against government [policy](#). Kurds, including political activists, are disproportionately represented in those receiving the death penalty and the numbers of people [executed](#). A centralised bureaucracy has kept the Kurdistan region poverty stricken, militarised and politically misrepresented. A high rate of unemployment leads to many Kurds becoming cross-border porters. Known as kolbars, these porters are regularly [killed](#) by Iranian border [guards](#), and also die or are severely injured when falling off the precarious mountain paths they travel. In addition to the harsh treatment of Kurds inside Iran, since 2017, Iran has militarily attacked the disputed territories in Iraq, including [Kirkuk](#), and has launched missile attacks on [Iranian Kurds](#) in Koya in the [Kurdistan Region of Iraq](#). These attacks have killed Peshmerga and civilians, including refugees.

**In Conclusion**, it could be argued that Kurds have become the world's most significant nation without a state. They have protected people and territory from ISIS in northern Iraq and Syria, and in Syria ultimately defeated ISIS with help from the US-led coalition. In

fighting ISIS, 14,000 Syrian Democratic Forces and Peshmerga were killed, and more than 34,000 were seriously injured. Yet, when Kurds need support, the international community makes a mockery of the UN Charter. For instance, when the Kurdistan Regional Government conducted a non-binding referendum on independence in September 2017, Israel was the only country that openly supported their right to do so. When Iraq, Iran and Turkey immediately responded with harsh punishments, from closing borders to Iran and Iraq militarily attacking and taking control of the disputed territories, the international community remained silent and paralysed. Without international mediation, too many matters remain unresolved between the GoI and the Kurdistan Regional Government. Similarly, in Syria, Kurds and their allies have spent the last seven years fighting ISIS, securing Kurd and Arab-majority regions, and administering what grew to be one third of Syrian territory. But the international community chose to do nothing to prevent Turkey invading Kurd-majority areas, and has not made it mandatory that representatives of the Syrian Democratic Forces and administration participate in negotiations on the future of Syria. Instead, Turkey-backed Islamist extremists take chairs at the negotiation table. Then there is the matter of PKK. These so-called terrorists helped save thousands of Yezidi people besieged by ISIS on Mount Sinjar in August 2014. They helped fight ISIS in battles for Kobani, Kirkuk and elsewhere. PKK advocates democratic confederalism, women's rights, ethnic rights and religious freedom. The Turkish state that accuses PKK of being a terrorist organisation has chosen to become an Islamist nationalist dictatorship. Turkey is the world's number one jailer of journalists, judges, lawyers, soldiers, parliamentarians, mayors and municipal councillors. Turkey is committing war crimes in three out of four countries in which Kurds reside. Even more dangerous for world peace, Turkey supports Islamist extremist mercenaries in these and other countries.

As Kurds gain more status, Turkey becomes more determined to destroy their achievements. For instance, just when the Kurd-led political parties in northern Syria are tentatively [reconciling](#), and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq is helping the AANES to meet the [challenges](#) of the coronavirus and Turkey's [invasion](#), Turkey is using every Machiavellian trick to [foster](#) a [civil war](#) between Kurdish political [organisations](#).

As such, on this centenary of the Treaty of Sevres, and in respect of the UN Charter, we ask you to advocate and facilitate international endeavours to convince the state of Turkey to:

- Withdraw all military forces and bases from Iraq and Syria;
- Refrain from military and political offensives against Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey;
- Release all political prisoners in Turkey; and sincerely
- Enter political negotiations with the PKK, HDP and other stakeholders in Turkey, and the AANES, Syrian Democratic Council, and Syrian Democratic Forces in Syria.

In addition, we ask you to advocate and act in support of:

- The AANES, Syrian Democratic Council and Syrian Democratic Forces being represented in political negotiations on the future of Syria;
- The rights of ethnic and religious minorities in Iran;
- Resolving military, economic and political impasses between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Government of Iraq; and
- Functional federations in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey.



In these and other ways you will be supporting the right for self-determination of at least 40 million Kurds, as well as the ethnic and religious minorities living in the Kurdistan Regions.

This statement and these requests are supported by the following organisations.

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[Map](#) of proposed borders, Treaty of Sevres, 1920.

NOTE: Stripes denote proposed Kurdistan. The area designated for Kurdistan left out Van, Mount Ararat, part of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and the Kurdistan region of Iran and Syria. The omission of Van in particular, which was designated to be part of Armenia, was another reason why Kurdish leaders accepted Kemal's promise of self-governance.