



Email: kurdishlobbyaus@gmail.com
Website: www.kurdishlobbyaustralia.com

29 March 2022

To the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Scott Morrison MP,
To the Leader of the Opposition, The Hon. Mr Anthony Albanese MP
To the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade, the Hon. Ms Marise Payne
To the Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Hon. Ms Penny Wong
To the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon. Ms Karen Andrews
To the Shadow Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon. Ms Kristina Keneally
And fellow Federal Parliamentarians of Australia

In this time of war, we write (again) to express our deep concern for the people living in the Kurdistan Regions and their relatives, friends and colleagues living in Australia, given the only public response from the Australian Government to our reports and letters over the last year has been the re-listing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a terrorist organisation in 2021. This classification causes tensions for those living in Australia and justifies Turkey's ongoing military and political attacks on Kurds in Turkey and invasion and occupation of northern Syria and Iraq. The West is outraged by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin's unprecedented threats to anyone who interferes with his goals. While a lack of agreement between NATO and Russia may have been one reason behind Putin's aggression, his actions since February 2022 defy the democratic will of the Ukrainian people, Russia's position on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and international law. Yet, just as the UN, NATO and any US-led coalition have been powerless to resolve the wars in Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey and Iraq, the UN seems also powerless to resolve the war in Ukraine. Internationally, this is the elephant in the room.

We are all concerned about what happens in Ukraine, and how this will influence Europe and Russia, as well as China, but from a Kurdistan and broader Middle Eastern perspective, if the West and international institutions had taken strong actions against Turkey defying international and domestic laws in its military and political actions against Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iraq, and had appropriately responded to Bashar Al-Assad and Russia's indiscriminate bombing of Syria, the current aggression in Ukraine may have been prevented. Whatever is being done in Ukraine in 2022 has been done in Syria by Assad, Russia, and Turkey. Not even Turkey's NATO membership has given NATO, the USA, or European Union leverage to stop Turkey's political and military aggression in three countries in the name of targeting a 'terrorist' group that strives for democracy, women's rights and ethnic minority representation, and who has been fighting ISIS since 2014. Nor is any institution publicly responding to Turkey's support for a mini-Islamist State in northern Syria and constant attacks in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Over many years, we have highlighted Turkey's attacks on Kurds - not just PKK fighters - but have received no response or action from the Australian Government. Turkey's actions include:

- **The imprisonment of Kurdish parliamentarians, mayors, artists, academics, teachers, journalists, activists and protesters**, including the former HDP co-chair and twice presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas, who the European Court of Human Rights deems a political prisoner that should be released;
- **Military attacks since July 2015** that have killed [5,860 civilians](#), and displaced more than two million people, and which intensified in 2021. Turkey's military actions include:
 - Ongoing military attacks on Kurdish towns and villages in the provinces of Diyarbakir, Sirnak, Hakkari and Mardin, after President Erdogan called an end to the ceasefire and peace negotiations with the PKK in July 2015 (after the pro-Kurdish party, People's Democratic Party (HDP), did well in the elections).



Email: kurdishlobbyaus@gmail.com
Website: www.kurdishlobbyaustralia.com

29 March 2022

- The establishment of 40 military bases in northern Iraq and ongoing air and ground attacks on the Yazidi district of Sinjar (that was subject to an ISIS genocide in 2014), the disputed province of Kirkuk, the UN recognised Makhmour Refugee camp, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. These attacks have killed in excess of 100 civilians, forced hundreds of villages to be evacuated, and prevented hundreds of thousands of displaced Yazidis from returning home.
- The unprovoked invasion, occupation and ethnic cleansing of Kurdish-majority Afrin and other areas in northwest and northeast Syria, involving 10,000 Turkish Armed Forces, warplanes, drones, and Syrian Arab and Turkmen proxies, the last taking over Kurdish homes, farmlands and businesses, regularly depriving millions of water, electricity and a livelihood, and in Afrin alone, since 2018, displacing 310,000 Kurdish civilians (56 percent of all residents), killing 639 Kurdish civilians, including 95 children; and kidnapping or arresting 7,497 Kurdish civilians, with those [released](#) usually having to pay a high ransom to Turkey's proxies.
- **Turkey' support for [ISIS](#):**
 - In allowing ISIS to travel to and from Syria, and finance and supply operations from Turkey;
 - Employing [former ISIS](#) and Al-Qaida fighters in the Turkey-trained, armed and intermittently paid Syrian 'National' Army, Turkey's extremely problematic proxy force in Syria, but also used in Libya and the Azerbaijan - Armenia war;
 - Allowing ISIS fighters and commanders to take refuge in Turkey and Turkey-occupied areas, or areas 'secured' by Turkey in north Syria, two examples being the ISIS caliph, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, found in October 2019 in Barisha, a few kilometres from the Turkish border and next to the Turkey-supervised Bar al-Hawa border crossing, and his successor, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurayshi, found near Atmeh in February 2022, again a few kilometres from the border, and next to a Turkish checkpoint; and
 - In Turkifying, Arabising and introducing a highly repressive, extremist interpretation of Islam in the formerly Kurdish-majority areas of northern Syria, creating a mini state.

Turkey justifies all these actions by claiming there is a need to eliminate all PKK 'terrorists' and anyone who considers Abdullah Ocalan's concepts are worthy of consideration, just as President Vladimir Putin justifies his invasion of Ukraine saying that Russia needs to denazify Ukraine. Both justifications are not supported by evidence. Kurds do not wish to harm the people of Turkey, just as Ukrainians do not wish to harm people of Russia, or anyone else. Rather these claims are the outcome of authoritarian leaders who think they can act with impunity to stay in power and recreate past glories, whether this is Russian President Vladimir Putin intent on recreating the great Rus, or Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's claim that Turkey has a 'right' to regain at least some of the lands administered by the [Ottoman Empire](#).

Instead of silence and inaction, practical responses actions could include:

- Countries like Australia, the USA and those in Europe declassifying the PKK as a terrorist organisation, based on evidence that can stand up in a court of law, as argued by Belgium courts and numerous [reports](#) presented to the Parliamentary Joint Committee for Intelligence and Security in 2015, 2018 and 2021; and



Email: kurdishlobbyaus@gmail.com
Website: www.kurdishlobbyaustralia.com

29 March 2022

- The international community, including Australia, using unilateral or coordinated incentives and costs (the latter in the form of sanctions, exclusion from decision-making bodies, etc.) if the aggressor does NOT:
 - Release all political prisoners.
 - Stop all aerial bombardment of civilian areas.
 - Withdraw all military bases and forces that have been unilaterally imposed on a population.
 - Withdraw support for all extremist militants.
 - Return all occupied land to their original inhabitants.
 - Support internationally mandated impartial investigations into alleged [war crimes](#) and crimes against humanity and ensure the guilty are brought to justice.
 - Embark on internationally mediated peace negotiations with clear milestones with political and civil leaders representing all segments of the population (including PKK in Turkey and representatives of the Syrian Democratic Forces and Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria) to ensure all people are assured their political, cultural, religious and economic [rights](#).

We suggest that Turkey's escalating aggression and authoritarianism in the name of nationalism and Islam inside Turkey and in the areas of northern Syria administered by Turkey and its proxies, is as much a threat to Europe and world stability as is Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and that when there are delays in curbing dictators, it does not end well. Just as the current war in Ukraine may have been avoided if Ukrainian-Russian issues were addressed after Russia invaded and occupied Crimea and destabilised the gas-rich Donbas in 2014, so too, it is imperative to respond to Turkey's militancy.

July 23, 2023 is the 100-year anniversary of the League of Nation's Treaty of Lausanne. This treaty set the borders of modern Turkey and rendered stateless the Kurdish nation, currently estimated to number 50 million people. After this date, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan could well claim the Treaty is no longer valid and claim that Turkey has a legitimate right to annex northern Syria and northern Iraq. Before any more unilateral actions by Erdogan, Putin, and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the last having launched [at least 12 ballistic missiles into Erbil](#), the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in [March 2022](#), and before climate change and other dynamics only increase instability, it is time to reform international institutions.

International action is not only about applying a range of levers on aggressors or supporting UN-mandated no-fly zones (in accordance with Article 45 of the UN Charter) and/or international peace-making missions to ensure the safety of civilian populations. It is incumbent on all institutions that support democracy to protect and support others who uphold democratic values, especially those who are forced to defend these values militarily, whether they are state actors like Ukraine, or non-state actors like the Kurd-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in eastern Syria. The latter have been fighting ISIS since 2013. These forces have also prevented the Syrian and/or Iranian regimes from installing oppressive administrations over nearly one third of Syrian territory that is currently administered by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). Just as Ukrainians are getting political, economic, and military support, so too, must support be given to these institutions on Syria. For instance, we maintain that unless representatives of the AANES and SDF have a seat at the negotiation table on Syria it will be impossible to achieve reasonable political outcomes. But these actors are excluded from all negotiations because world leaders and institutions comply with Turkey's Kurdish paranoia.

Then there is Iran, which vies with Turkey as a destabilising influence. In Iran, Kurds are imprisoned for teaching the Kurdish language, supporting conservation initiatives, and belonging to 'illegal' political parties. Kurds



Email: kurdishlobbyaus@gmail.com
Website: www.kurdishlobbyaustralia.com

29 March 2022

represent the highest proportion of those who receive the death penalty. To counter the oppressive theocratic military regime in Iran, the international community needs to provide Iran's religious and ethnic minorities a means to network in support of cultural, religious, political, and economic rights.

The only internationally recognised government for Kurds and Assyrians, and various religious minorities, is the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG). Recent events in Europe directly impact the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The Russian fossil fuel companies Gazprom and Rosneft are integral to Iraqi Kurdistan's oil and gas sector, Rosneft having invested in a gas pipeline to Turkey, from where Kurdistan's oil and gas are exported. Since its internationally recognised establishment in 2005, the KRG struggles to establish a viable democracy because it is besieged by bullies, these being the governments of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq, and because Western leaders continue to support the Barzani and Talabani dynasties rather than make support for the KRG conditional on finalising and implementing a constitution, and establishing an independent judiciary, a joint Peshmerga force, and democratic, transparent levels of government. Support for the government of Iraq should similarly be conditional on the government fully [implementing](#) the federal constitution and addressing the basic needs of the people, endemic corruption, brutality and injustice. For instance, there has been no resolution to the status of the disputed territories, which include the Yezidi district of Sinjar (Shingal), and the province of Kirkuk. Contrary to expert interpretations of the constitution, the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq recently ruled that the KRG must hand over all oil and gas interests to the 'Federal' Government. This is the same 'Federal' Government that frequently stops all revenue payments to the KRG and pays the salaries of militias that answer to Iran but refuses to pay the salaries of Peshmerga fighting ISIS. A system of positive and negative levers is required to convince the Government of Iraq to become a true federation, and to convince Turkey, Syria, and Iran to resolve tensions with Kurdish populations and other ethnicities, otherwise the people of the Kurdistan Regions have as much right to an independent nation state as the people of Ukraine.

As for Australia's contribution to the Kurdistan Regions and the countries now ruling these regions, we suggest it would be mutually beneficial if Australian expertise, organisations and businesses, collaborate on matters related to the conservation of land and water, drought mitigation, agriculture (e.g. conservation farming of livestock and cropping), and sustainable energy. For instance, Australia's live trade in sheep to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates could be replaced or supplemented by Australia establishing pastoral partnerships in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Sheep raised there would only need to travel ten hours by truck to Saudi Arabia.

As for civilians who try to escape war and oppression, it is to Australia's deep shame that successive federal governments have placed asylum seekers and refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Sri Lanka in indefinite detention, in contrast to Australia's current Prime Minister, the Hon. Mr Scott Morrison, making an open offer to accept Ukrainians in need of refuge. It is time the Australian Government value's each life, no matter where that life comes from and abide by international agreements on refugees and human rights. In a multicultural nation like Australia, surely parliamentarians realise that for 97 percent of the population who have come from other countries (based on First Nations people being three percent of the population) how the Australian government treats its citizens, permanent and temporary residents, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, and what foreign policies the Australian government implements, matters.

The Middle East may be on the other side of the world, but Australia has been involved in every war the USA and/or Britain have fought in the region: WW1, WW2, the Kuwait War of 1990-91, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the war against ISIS since 2014. All this war costs the Australian taxpayer in defence spending and lost trade. Yet these military efforts have not significantly benefited the people of the Middle East. We have long argued



Email: kurdishlobbyaus@gmail.com
Website: www.kurdishlobbyaustralia.com

29 March 2022

that the amount of resources spent on collaboratively rebuilding war-torn countries should be at least equivalent to the cost of our military contribution to their destruction.

In this interconnected multipolar world, it is time to respect all people and nations, whether they are represented by a state or not. To achieve this it is imperative that the UN, international courts and other respected organisations are reformed. Perhaps the UN Security Council needs to be abolished, OR a party that is responsible for a unilateral war be made ineligible to [vote](#), and/or perhaps no ONE vote should paralyse the UNSC. Perhaps it is time to make a large majority vote in the General Assembly binding and actionable, and/or to have assemblies that give states and non-state nations a voice, much like a House of Representatives and a Senate. In an era in which authoritarianism and dysfunction are rife, it becomes ever more crucial to have an effective UN.

We are all complicit in the world we create. It is Australia's best interest to push for UN reforms, strengthen alliances with like-minded nations and institutions and support those who support democracy. It is for everyone's benefit to replace empty [rhetoric](#) and great power politics with international processes to ensure a better future. Where are today's Herbert Vere Evatt, who signed the UN Charter in 1948 and helped draft the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or Gareth Evans, who developed the Responsibility to Protect principle (although his dealings with East Timor were less [ideal](#))? Why is the UN's Responsibility to Protect not being actioned for Kurds, Ukrainians and so many other victims?

Yours Sincerely,

Mr Zirian Fatah (Vice President)
Kurdish Lobby Australia

Dr Gina Lennox, (Public Officer)
Email: kurdishlobbyaus@gmail.com
Kurdish Lobby Australia