



# KNK

**Kurdistan National Congress**

## **A Summary of Background Information on the Earthquake in Kurdistan, Turkey and Syria**

*on causes and consequences - the state's deliberate policy of discrimination against  
Kurds after the disaster - Background Information on the Inaction of the Turkish State -  
Solutions Proposed by the Kurdish Freedom Movement in this Time of the Crisis*

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## **Halt of Military Actions in Turkey: Seeking Peace amidst the Earthquake Rubble**

On February 6<sup>th</sup>, two major earthquakes occurred seven hours apart in the Kurdish regions of Turkey (Northern Kurdistan). Considering the intensity of the earthquakes and the damage they caused, they are among the largest earthquakes witnessed by mankind in the last hundred years. These earthquakes caused extensive damage in the Kurdish populated areas, as well as in Turkish and Syrian cities. The death toll is in the tens of thousands, the number of injured in the hundreds of thousands, and the number of people affected in excess of 13.5 million. The negligent attitude of both the Turkish and Syrian governments before the earthquake, and their failure to intervene in a timely manner after the earthquake have led to further human losses and a humanitarian crisis.

### **Inaction after the earthquake as a political approach**

The consequences of the earthquake show the extent of the inability of Erdogan's Regime in Turkey and his AKP-MHP coalition government to govern. As a result, the devastating consequences must induce a serious and radical political change throughout Turkey. It is clearer than ever that Erdogan is incapable of leading Turkey in times of crisis. Compounding his corrupt incompetence and kleptocratic embezzlement is that in recent years he has become obsessed with placing all of the state's resources towards waging a brutal and illegal war against the Kurds within Turkey, Syria, and Iraq.

Yes, the earthquake itself is a natural event. However, the damage caused could have been lessened if Erdogan has not stolen funds meant for earthquake preparation, and even then, the loss of life could have been minimized if his regime cared enough to organize humanitarian aid in a timely and equitable manner. Yet, because many of the affected areas are 90% Kurdish, the AKP-MHP alliance is practicing organized discrimination and deprivation against the Kurds. Essentially, they are weaponizing the earthquake as a "bomb" to destroy the remaining cities which the Turkish military did not wipe out during their assaults in 2015 and 2016.

Making matters worse, Erdogan then views any Kurds who insist on their right to be treated as equal citizens, as a threat to his great power ambitions and permanent Presidency (dictatorship). It is evident that Erdogan has no plans to help the Kurds survive after this disaster, which merely carried out carnage against a people that he already perceived as a sworn enemy anyway.

It is also important to understand the relationship between the Turkish government and the deep state apparatus, which controls its levers of power and radiates cruelty against millions of Kurds. The current deep state is based on a "Turkish-Islamic synthesis", which combines the conservative Salafi-Islam and neo-Ottoman aspirations of the AKP and melds them with the Turkic ultra-nationalism and neo-fascism of the MHP. Importantly, their unity is based on anti-Kurdishness—who they both equally see as an incompatible threat to their worldview and rule.

### **The Racist State and who gets Aid**

The People's anger towards the AKP-MHP regime is further fuelled by the fact that emergency aid is distributed according to racist standards. For instance, the Kurdish-Alevi population of Maraş province, the epicenter of the earthquake, has not received any Turkish state assistance, which is similar to the way the Arab-dominated Hatay Province has been treated. In both cases, their lack of a Turkish majority population renders them at best as a non-priority for Erdogan's regime, and at worst, a direct target for intentional structural deprivation to produce future ethnic cleansing.

In addition, the Disaster Control Authority (AFAD) is preventing self-organized relief efforts by the population. As time and again, we receive reports of how donations collected by the AFAD are confiscated or distributed unevenly among the earthquake victims. This fact has also been noticed and reported on by the international media. That the Turkish state shows its callous racist face even in this hour of greatest suffering, is beneath contempt.

### **Corruption as a Cause of Disaster**

In the case of natural disasters such as earthquakes, the essential question is whether the major consequences could be kept to a minimum through foresight. Unfortunately, since the establishment of a Presidential system in 2017, Erdogan has only been concerned with staying in power.

In order to capitalize and profit from the political vacuum that was created in 2012 with the Syrian conflict, the Turkish deep state allowed for this evolution, as it hoped that radical centralization would allow Turkey to harness the power of the state and wield it as a weapon more quickly—with the added benefit that it would make siphoning off state funds more efficient.

And while yes, earthquakes at the fracture edges of tectonic plates cannot be prevented, their devastating dimensions which produce tens of thousands of dead, injured, and homeless certainly can. For example, there are already regulations in the Turkish building codes which ostensibly are supposed to make new buildings ‘earthquake-proof’.

But due to the mafia-like network of the ruling party AKP in the construction sector, politically-connected building contractors can still build high-rise buildings without official testing for earthquake safety. Only profit and enrichment of friends counts, not the safety of the population. As a result, many people in Turkey are now asking themselves where the money from the earthquake tax levied for 20 years has gone\_ As it certainly was not used on the now-crumbled structures in the earthquake region. The answer is that much of it went into the private foreign bank accounts of Erdogan and his friends.

### **Turkey and Kurdistan can no longer live with Erdogan’s Regime**

Based on the aftermath, with tens of thousands of people still lying under rubble, it is clear that this mass death has political causes. The fact that Erdogan’s regime has not only left people to die under the rubble but is also using drones to militarily attack the Kurds in Rojava—who are providing humanitarian aid—shows the extent of the political disaster. It is time to finally put a political end to such a sadistic anti-human regime.

Moreover, the unilaterally declared ceasefire of the PKK on February 9<sup>th</sup> offers a historic opportunity for the entire future of Turkey. Hopefully, the international community will meet their responsibility and insist that Turkey gives peace a chance to prevent further human tragedies. The PKK’s unilateral cease-fire can be an opening, through which a new freer, and more equal Turkey can pass through, producing a radical transformation in the lives of 80+ million citizens. As anyone who still considers Turkey important for whatever reason must realize that there is no future with Erdogan’s regime, only death, pain, cruelty, incompetence, corruption, and militarism.

## **Political Transformation in Turkey for Peace in the Middle East**

In more recent years of his rule, Erdogan has put all his focus on the war against the Kurds in Syria and Iraq. Thus, its expansionist policy of occupying Kurdish territories in these two states was the decisive cause of instability. The Erdogan regime has disregarded the sovereignty of these countries and launched illegal widescale murder across both nations.

Internationally, he has tried to legitimize these war crimes, by pointing to the presence of the PKK. Which is made possible, by the fact that the PKK was dishonestly placed on the list of foreign terrorist organizations of the EU and USA (despite never attacking either in their entire history), as a means to procure weapon sales to Turkey. And even when the PKK displayed their true anti-terror nature in 2014 by defeating the jihadist forces of ISIS (which were sponsored by the Turkish state)—saving many Yazidis in the process—the EU and USA still refused to recognize their obvious humanism and delist.

It is also the Erdogan regime that is perverting Islam for the purposes of great power ambitions in the Middle East. Starting with Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, etc., Erdogan’s ideology of “Islamism-Turkism” has been the mastermind behind the radicalization of Islamic groups throughout the region.

## **Stability is only Possible through a Solution to the Kurdish Question**

The declared target and enemy of the Turkish state are still the Kurds. However, neither the arrests of Kurdish politicians, human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, and activists, nor the crushing of Kurdish municipalities, nor the banning of the pro-Kurdish HDP, have made it possible for the Turkish regime to silence Kurdish voices.

Coinciding with such domestic oppression, on the military front the use of chemical weapons, building of more than 100 Turkish military bases, and high-tech warfare from NATO’s second largest army, also could not prevent PKK fighters from protecting Southern Kurdistan (Iraq) from Turkish occupation.

In neighbouring Rojava / northern Syria, the Turkish regime has also not been able to prevent the Kurds and their Arab or Christian fellow citizens from continuing to fight against Turkish occupation objectives, which utilize jihadist mercenaries, alongside daily drone attacks or shelling against civilians.

## **International Approval has Prolonged the Turkish Problem**

While the Kurdish freedom movement under the PKK and especially Abdullah Ocalan have done everything possible for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question, their steps towards a solution have been ignored.

Despite his inhumane conditions of detention and despite the fact that competent international bodies such as the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, and the CPT have never fully defended Ocalan’s right to freedom, he has been very active for peace. In fact, every letter he has ever written under very difficult prison conditions has been dedicated to lasting peace.

## **Now International Action is Required**

With the banning of the PKK and the abduction of the PKK founder and leader of the Kurdish people Abdullah Ocalan on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999, international forces provided great support to the Turkish state (based on their NATO membership). However, now Erdogan's regime is putting his neo-Ottoman priorities of creating a Greater Turkey ahead of his obligations as a NATO member. The recent examples of Sweden and Finland speak for themselves, as does Turkish threats against NATO member Greece, and Turkey's continued occupation of EU member Cyprus.

Turkey under Erdogan is adhering less and less to bilateral and multilateral agreements. On the contrary, it forces many of its partners to dance to its tune. And neither the ban against the PKK, nor the 24 years of inhumane punishment of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan on the Turkish prison island of Imrali, could stop the Kurd's march for freedom. The joint resistance of Ocalan, the PKK, and the Kurdish people still continues.

## **Brief History of the Kurdish Struggle for Peace**

To their credit, the PKK have declared unilateral ceasefires in 1993, 1995-96, 1998, 1999, 2006, and 2009. Unfortunately, all these signs of the will for peace were merely exploited by Turkish regimes to build up their armaments for future attacks. Alongside such ceasefires, other actions have been taken by the Kurdistan freedom movement, which were also ignored by Turkey's regimes. Such as:

- The Peace Project (January 2000).
- The Urgent Action Plan for Democracy and Peace (November 2000).
- The Declaration of Urgent Demands to prevent a new war and to develop the solution process (June 2001).
- The Declaration of Urgent Solution (November 2002)
- The KADEK Assembly declared a three-stage road map (July 2003).
- The Kongra-Gel Executive Council presented the Road Map for Democratic and Lasting Peace (September 2004).
- Declaration of a ceasefire (October 2006).
- KCK Decision on military passive defense (military inaction) after the call of Abdullah Öcalan (2009).
- Abdullah Ocalan then wrote the books: *The Road Map to Democratisation in Turkey* and *Solution to the Kurdish Question*. However, the state confiscated the works and did not release them until 2011.
- KCK decided to declare non-conflict time for local elections until June. After the first ceasefire decision expired on 1 June, it was extended until July 15. Then the ceasefire was extended until September 1, and with a new announcement it was extended until after the Ramadan feast (2009).
- Peace groups from Qandil and Maxmur entered Turkey through the Habur border gate and were welcomed by millions of people. The group from Europe was canceled due to obstructions by the Turkish state (October 2009).

- Following Ocalan's call, the KCK organized a peace group from Qandil, Maxmur, and Europe to Turkey as a good will action for peace. But later members of the group were arrested and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment (October 2009).
- Taking a stand against the AKP's stalling policy, Abdullah Öcalan declared that he was no longer in military service (May 2010).
- Öcalan in a letter: “In the witnessing of millions today, I am going to start a new era. Not arms but politics. Our armed forces should withdraw beyond the border (of Turkey)” – during the Newroz celebrations on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013 in Diyarbakır (Amed). Of note, the list of PKK and Ocalan efforts for peace is long. Only a few are listed above.

### **KCK/PKK calls for a Halt of Military Actions in Turkey**

In a statement on Friday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an umbrella organization of the Kurdish freedom movement of which the Kurdistan Workers party – PKK, is also a member, called for a halt of military actions in Turkey, in metropolises, and cities. “It is necessary to prevent the people from experiencing even more suffering in this affliction”, said Cemil Bayık, co-chairman of the executive council of the KCK.

Shortly after, the central headquarters of the People’s Defense Forces – HPG declared their support for the call of the KCK, for an immediate halt of military actions because of the earthquake in the Turkish-Syrian border area. “The guerrillas are ready to support the KCK in their efforts to stop the fighting and thus contribute to alleviating the suffering of the affected population” it stated.

The KCK’s call sends an important message for peace in light of the terrible earthquake disaster that has struck Kurdistan, Turkey, and northern Syria. At the same time, Bayık and the KCK made it clear that the attitude of the Turkish state will be of central importance in the implementation of this decision.

### **AKP-MHP does not Deviate from War**

The Kurdish freedom movement has taken similar steps before in the face of humanitarian tragedies. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1999, a major earthquake centered in Gölcük hit western Turkey. At that time, the PKK made a similar statement, calling for peace and declaring inaction. Sadly, the Turkish side ignored this call for peace and the declaration of inaction and instead continued the war.

Unfortunately, the signs so far do not indicate that the Turkish government will react positively to the KCK’s peace offer. The very day after the earthquake, the Turkish army bombed areas in the northern Syrian valley of Rifaat, which were also badly affected by the earthquake. In Turkey itself, the Erdogan regime has imposed a state of emergency on the earthquake areas. Which internationally is argued to be intended to silence voices critical of Ankara’s crisis mismanagement.

Even if such an earthquake cannot be prevented, the scale of the disaster could certainly have been stopped. As a large part of the public money for earthquake-proofing systematically flowed instead into the war budget. Today, Turkey has sophisticated military technology but is not able to provide enough technical equipment to rescue those affected by the earthquake from under the rubble. They can destroy but are unable to save.

## **Increase International Pressure on the AKP**

It is therefore all the more important that international pressure on the Turkish government grows, in order to persuade it to accept the KCK's peace offer. With this offer, the Kurdish freedom movement has once again credibly demonstrated that it is interested in a political solution to the war, that has been ongoing between the Turkish state and the PKK, for 39 years. If the AKP regime can be persuaded to accept it, the catastrophe of the earthquake could turn into an opportunity for a lasting peace in the region.

In this matter, it is also important to remember the responsibility of the international community. It can play a constructive role for peace if it pressures Turkey to accept the peace offer, or at least not to continue to remain silent on the AKP's war policies.

In the wake of this devastating and highly destructive earthquake, the KCK/PKK has unilaterally launched a new process in good faith. This step of goodwill needs to be addressed in order to reach an end to the war and the attacks. Without serious international pressure, efforts, and initiatives, the suffering will continue exponentially.

Countless people lost everything in this earthquake. The number of victims continues to rise. It will take a long time to alleviate the suffering of the people. No one deserves peace now more than they do. For this reason, we call on the international public to support the KCK's peace offer.

**For further questions and interview requests, please contact:**

**Email: [kongrakurdistan@gmail.com](mailto:kongrakurdistan@gmail.com)**

**Tel: +32 2 647 30 84**