

PKK accepts Öcalan's call to end armed struggle

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4 March 2025

Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), made a statement last Thursday through a visiting delegation of the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party). Calling on the PKK, which has been engaged in an intermittent civil war with the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) since 1984, to lay down its arms and dissolve, Öcalan proposed "integration with the state" by declaring his party historically and politically bankrupt.

The PKK leadership, based in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq, has welcomed the call and declared a ceasefire. "We agree with the content of the call as it is, and we say that we will follow and implement it from our own side," the PKK Executive Committee said in a statement Saturday.

The PKK wrote, "It is clear that a new historical process has begun in Kurdistan and the Middle East with this [Öcalan's] call. This will also have a great impact on the development of free life and democratic governance worldwide."

The PKK leadership stated that "a suitable democratic political and legal foundation must also be established" for the success of the call, and suggested that Öcalan himself should lead the congress. This would require Öcalan to attend the congress from the prison on İmralı Island, where he has been held since 1999, or to be released.

"As of yesterday, we have entered a new phase. We have the opportunity to take an important step towards the goal of demolishing the wall of terrorism that has been built between our millennia-old brotherhood," President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on February 28, claiming, "When the pressure of weapons and terrorism is removed, the democratic space of politics will naturally expand further."

This statement comes amid an intense wave of repression and arrests targeting broad swathes of political and social opposition, under conditions where the PKK has largely ceased its activities in the country for a long time. The abolition of remaining democratic rights in Turkey is not based on the "pressure of arms and terror", but mainly on

the deepening war in the Middle East and the growing class tensions at home.

Erdoğan threatened that if the PKK fails to fulfil its promises, "We will continue our ongoing operations, if necessary, leveling with the ground and leaving no head upon shoulder."

After previous negotiations collapsed in 2015 over fears of a Kurdish state in Syria and Turkey, the civil war inside the country escalated bloodily and the Turkish army launched several military operations against Kurdish militias in Syria. Turkey now controls many areas of north-western Syria, while the north-east of the country is controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and US forces.

Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the fascist ally of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party, welcomed Öcalan's call, saying that "in the chaotic environment the world is in, a historic opportunity for Turkey has been opened".

Bahçeli said the call was "valuable from the beginning to the end" and that the PKK's statement was "supportive and complementary" to it. The Erdoğan government's negotiation process with Öcalan and the PKK began in October with Bahçeli's own call.

Selahattin Demirtaş, the imprisoned former co-chairman of the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP), the predecessor of the DEM Party, wrote an article praising the role of Erdoğan, Bahçeli and Öcalan in the process, saying, "May God grant them all a long and healthy life, but I will do my best to ensure the success of these three leaders who have taken the initiative for peace in the Middle East and for the historic Kurdish-Turkish peace at the last stage of their lives."

Demirtaş, whose immunity was lifted with the support of the Republican People's Party (CHP), has been unlawfully imprisoned since November 2016.

Serra Süreyya Önder, a DEM Party deputy and member of the delegation that met with Öcalan, joined the chorus of praise for Bahçeli, the leader of a party with a history of massacring working-class militants, leftists and minority

Alevis, and of supporting the oppression of the Kurdish people. “Mr. Devlet [Bahçeli] is one of the most elegant people I have seen in my political life in terms of one-to-one human relations,” said Önder in a Habertürk live broadcast on Monday.

Workers will not oppose the end of an armed conflict which has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Kurdish and Turkish youth since 1984 and has been exploited to divide the working class. But the glorification of the reactionary representatives of the Turkish bourgeoisie must be rejected. These political leaderships are organically incapable of building a democratic regime because of their bourgeois class nature, tied to imperialism and hostile to the working class.

Throughout the history of the Republic, the Erdoğan government has continued the state policy of suppressing the democratic demands of the Kurdish people. Even during the negotiations with Öcalan, the government’s repression against Kurdish politicians and people has escalated. Since last year’s local elections, 12 mayors from the DEM Party--elected by hundreds of thousands of Kurdish voters--have been dismissed, hundreds of Kurdish politicians arrested, and the legal political organisation the Peoples’ Democratic Congress (HDK) criminalised as an “extension of a terrorist organisation”.

The government’s wave of repression and arrests is not only directed against the Kurdish political movement, but against all political opposition, and is mainly aimed at suppressing a mass movement of the working class.

In the last months, there have been operations against CHP municipalities, the leadership of the Istanbul Bar Association has been charged with “terrorism”, opposition journalists, trade union leaders and left-wing party members have been arrested or are under investigation and strikes and demonstrations have been banned. These steps are taken under an authoritarian presidential regime, built with the support of the bourgeois opposition parties in one way or another.

The US and European powers welcome the negotiations between Ankara and Öcalan/the PKK because they further their predatory aims in the Middle East. They believe that an agreement between their ally Ankara and the Kurdish nationalist movement will serve their aggressive plans, especially against Iran and its allies.

On Sunday, the pro- Erdoğan government daily *Türkiye Gazetesi* accused Iran of planning to undermine the negotiations in a report citing AKP and senior security sources.

Without proof, the newspaper wrote, “Iran knows that if the PKK disintegrates, it will have no more organisations to use in the region. For this reason, Iran may want to

undermine the process in the coming period by using the leaders of the organisation close to it.”

“The marginal left wing within the DEM [party] will oppose it because it does not suit their calculations... There may be those who want to infect the process. Marxist remnants inside could infect it,” the paper added. This comment comes in the wake of the arrest of 30 people from parties, which are members of the HDK, in the midst of an investigation into the HDK involving thousands of people.

One of the critical points in the debate on the PKK’s laying down its arms and dissolving itself was whether Öcalan’s call included its sister organisations in other countries, in particular the YPG (People’s Defence Units) in Syria.

Ankara advocates that the YPG should dissolve itself and be subordinated to the new Damascus regime. “The terrorist organisation PKK, PYD, YPG, SDF, by whatever name, with all its extensions in Iraq and Syria, must lay down arms and dissolve itself,” AKP spokesman Ömer Çelik said.

Last month, it was announced that during talks with the HTS in Syria, an agreement was reached on the integration of the SDF and its autonomous administration into the Damascus regime. According to SDF representative Abu Omar Al-Idlibi, speaking to *Asharq Al-Awsat*, “the SDF would be integrated into Syria’s Ministry of Defence as a single unit, potentially within a corps or as part of the ministry’s eastern command.” Meanwhile, tensions continue to rise between Israel and Turkey, which has expanded its occupation of Syria following the regime change in Damascus and declared the Kurds a “natural ally”.

The bitter experiences of the past century have proved that a progressive solution to the Kurdish question, which is intertwined with a deepening imperialist war in the Middle East and involves four countries in the region, cannot be found within the capitalist nation-state system. Such a solution can only be achieved by the working class in an independent and international struggle in uncompromising opposition to imperialism for a Middle Eastern Socialist Federation.



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