

RESOLUTION ON THE CONFLICT IN TURKEY

As a result of the ongoing war in the Kurdish populated region in Turkey, extensive violations of human rights and damage to the region and its population are occurring. Hundreds of civilians including women, children, and the elderly have been killed; hundreds of thousands have had to leave their homes, heading towards difficulties and unforeseen dangers; historical sites and constructions have been destroyed, and common human heritage sites razed to the ground. The everyday life of people has been hampered: children cannot continue their education, freedom of expression is undermined, and journalists, authors, intellectuals, politicians, as well as human rights workers have been targeted. Extensive damage has affected the economy, with large forests and fields of crops burnt. Large areas are now effectively 'no man's land' where ordinary civilians cannot access their homes to resume their life.

The situation is so dire in Turkey that even uttering the word 'peace' is dangerous, open to accusation, punishment and attacks. In spite and because of this situation, PEN International supported the initiative of Kurdish, Turkish and international writers and experts to organise a Peace Conference in the city of Diyarbakir on 24-25 April, 2016. With the dear memories of our losses including author Hrant Dink¹ and human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi², who were also working for the same aims, we emphasized our responsibilities then, and reaffirming it now, that we will do our utmost to work for the end of this ugly war in order to leave our children a better world worth living in.

The scale of violence in Turkey, which is causing such human tragedy, is particularly alarming. The situation has been exacerbated by the existence of the extremist group calling itself Islamic State that is spreading the war across borders, and endangering the already very fragile situation in the Middle East and beyond.

As a result, civilians in many towns and cities in Turkey are also paying a heavy price for the ongoing conflicts, with scores killed in a series of terrorist attacks.

An inclusive peace settlement in Turkey depends on political reforms within the legislative framework. The solution to realise a long-lasting and meaningful peace in Turkey can only be reached through dialogue and peaceful measures.

Since there is neither freedom without peace, nor peace without freedom, as well as social and political justice, the members of PEN recognize that it is of primary importance to be permanently committed to creating the conditions that can lead to ending conflicts of all kinds.

Therefore, the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, meeting at its 82nd World Congress in Ourense, Galicia (Spain), 26th September to 2nd October 2016, makes the following appeals:

To all parties to the conflict in Turkey

- End the targeting of civilians;
- Stop using arms, and start a dialogue;

¹ Killed in January 2007 <http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/on-this-day-turkey-%E2%80%93-hrant-dink-murdered-19-january-2007/>

² Killed on 28 November 2015 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/tahir-elci-turkish-human-rights-lawyer-shot-dead-during-press-conference-turkey-a6753356.html>

- Continue a meaningful process of reconciliation, and make genuine attempts towards removing barriers towards finding a peaceful political solution to the Kurdish question in the country rather than a military solution;

To the Turkish authorities

- Genuinely listen to the demands of the local communities and end the army deployment and embargo on the towns and cities in order to help civilians returning to their homes to rebuild their lives again;
- Accept calls to restart peace talks aiming to find a long-lasting solution to the Kurdish question in the country;
- Review all relevant articles of the law with a view of bringing them into accord with international human rights standards, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and European Convention on Human Rights, to which Turkey is a state party;
- Cease all arbitrary arrests and detentions, and implement genuine and binding legislative reforms, in order to establish a truly equitable order and inclusive peace for everyone, especially to overturn the harsh decision of lifting the immunity of the democratically elected representatives of people;
- Release all elected Kurdish mayors and administrators currently detained and imprisoned who are held solely on account of their peaceful political activities;
- Stop the appointment of individuals selected by government in the municipalities in Kurdish cities and towns in place of the democratically elected post holders.

To the international community

- Support the call for peace in Turkey;
- Do everything within your power, including through international and regional institutions such as the United Nations and European Union to solve the dire situation in Turkey that is causing human tragedy in the region and beyond;
- Provide humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the conflict, including artistic and cultural programmes which can help with the processing of trauma and re-establish a shared understanding of our common humanity.