

Peace in Kurdistan Campaign

Open letter to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to think again on the planned World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul

We learn with disbelief that the first World Humanitarian Summit will be hosted by President Erdogan in Istanbul.*)

Of all locations where such an international event could be held, Turkey, at the present time, is the least suitable.

The world is currently facing a humanitarian crisis on a massive scale. With that sentiment we wholeheartedly concur. Action needs to be taken at an international level to foster peace, reduce conflict and ameliorate the social divisions that are literally tearing countries apart.

As the preamble to the coming UN summit states, "In our rapidly changing world, we must continually seek better ways to meet the needs of millions of people affected by conflicts and disasters."

The conflict that has been unfolding in Turkey's southeast over the past few months is one such conflict that needs to be urgently resolved. It is precisely because the Turkish government has turned to an unwinnable military solution to the Kurdish conflict that a humanitarian disaster is now looming in many parts of the southeast. This ongoing conflict makes the location of the forthcoming UN Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul wholly inappropriate.

The government headed by President Erdogan has consciously exacerbated a conflict with its Kurdish minority population since the result of last year's first national election which saw the pro-Kurdish HDP achieve a dramatic breakthrough that denied the AKP its majority.

People are currently being slaughtered as a result of a malign state policy that is fanning sectarian conflicts and deepening social tensions. Peace-making has been taken off the agenda in Turkey and the whole country is suffering the consequences. It is therefore very hard to see how the government in Ankara deserves to be rewarded by the honour of hosting such an important international initiative.

One of the main themes of the planned summit is to be, "Serving the needs of people in conflict", which surely renders it utterly inappropriate for Turkey to be hosting the event, given the current humanitarian disaster taking place in cities across the country's southeast which have been subjected to curfew, bombardment and deliberate destruction by Turkish state forces.

This important and timely initiative by the UN Secretary-General set to take place on 23 and 24 May 2016 will bring together governments, humanitarian organisations, representatives of peoples affected by humanitarian crises and others to develop solutions to the world's most pressing challenges and set an agenda for future humanitarian action.

The Kurdish people are desperate for such action to resolve their plight but the government in Ankara is making their lives intolerable and destroying their communities.

Therefore, at a time when the Turkish state is waging a war against its own people in the Kurdish southeast under the pretext of fighting the PKK, the summit definitely should not be held in Istanbul.

It is a time when President Erdogan has been taking ever more divisive steps that are fostering fear and conflict among communities in the country.

It is a time when independent Turkish journalists, academics, lawyers and creative artists are harried, intimidated and prosecuted for exercising legitimate rights to free expression.

It is a time when basic democratic, political and human rights are under serious assault from an increasingly authoritarian government run by the AKP.

It is a time when the Kurdish people as a whole are collectively targeted and punished mercilessly for alleged support for the PKK.

It is a time when Kurdish men, women, children, old people, are indiscriminately bombarded by Turkish military operations against towns and villages; a time, when hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent people have been forced to flee their homes in fear; a time, when largely erroneous accusations are levelled by the Turkish government at Kurdish people branding them as sponsors of terrorism.

This is all the result of a sectarian domestic policy, unprecedented in modern times, which is taking Turkey back to the dark days of the 1990s when martial law, death squads and targeted assassinations were a regular feature of daily life; when political prisoners were detained without a fair trial, when the country was notorious across the world for its torture of political dissidents, when activists simply disappeared and when the bodies of Kurds were ritually mutilated by security forces whose activities were protected by a secretive state that flagrantly snubbed all international human rights standards and norms of legality.

In view of the worsening situation inside Turkey today we must strongly urge the UN to reconsider its decision to select Istanbul as the venue for this important event. Please think again even at this late hour.

Your valuable initiative will be seriously undermined and tainted by association with a regime that routinely abuses its powers; a divisive government that poses a threat to democracy, free speech and civil rights; an authoritarian government that has been accused of pursuing a sectarian foreign policy, and one that has even been alleged to be an active supporter of Islamic State terrorism in Syria.

Indeed, it is widely alleged in particular that Ankara has been assisting ISIS with the supply of weapons; that it has facilitated illegal trading by ISIS; that it is turning a blind eye to ISIS fund raising, permitting the transport and delivery of lethal military equipment across Turkish territory and likewise permitting volunteers to travel through Turkey to join the ranks of ISIS.

There is much more than circumstantial evidence to indicate that Turkey is heavily involved in the ISIS support network and as such these allegations need to be subject to a thoroughgoing, independent investigation. While such question marks hang over Turkey and its record, the policies of the AKP government should give grave cause for concern for the UN and all who uphold freedom and

democracy. We therefore genuinely believe that the country at present constitutes a totally unsuitable host for the forthcoming humanitarian summit.

If the summit is held in Istanbul as planned it will only be used by Erdogan as fuel for his own well-oiled propaganda machine. It will be interpreted by Turkey's tethered media as a ringing endorsement of Erdogan, the AKP and the increasingly divisive policies it pursues at home and abroad.

In particular, it will help to prolong the conflict with the Kurds when this historic conflict demands impartial mediation to achieve a lasting peace and which seemed to be a real possibility less than two years ago when the peace process was starting to get under way.

To hold a humanitarian summit in Turkey will be an affront to the Kurds and all those who are now suffering under the oppressive measures pursued by the government of Erdogan, who is seeking to acquire more and more presidential powers.

Not so long ago Turkey was held up as a model of moderation to be emulated all over the Middle East and Asia; it has now become a real threat to its neighbours, to the democratic process inside the country and to its own people. The Kurds right now are facing the full force of the Turkish state's brutal onslaught. This must be stopped by raising voices loud and clear against it; rather than passed over in silence.

In order to maximise the potential success of this humanitarian summit and to command universal support, we urge you to think again and to relocate the summit to a more suitable location.

We feel sure that such a location can be found.

SIGNATORIES

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*) link to the event: www.worldhumanitariansummit.org

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Peace in Kurdistan

Campaign for a political solution of the Kurdish Question

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