

Freedom for Öcalan

**The Process for Peace and Democratic Society
and the "Right to Hope"**



Campaign Committee - Freedom for Öcalan,
Political Solution to the Kurdish Question

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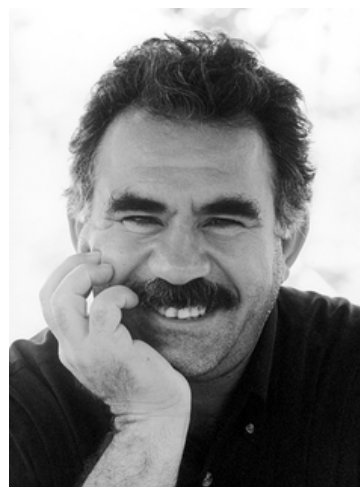


In 1999, Kurdish peoples' leader Abdullah Öcalan was abducted as a result of an international conspiracy and imprisoned in Imrali Island Prison.

Despite this, his movement remains central to Kurdish struggles for autonomy and democracy in the Middle East. His theories inspire global movements for women's liberation, ecology and coexistence. Today, as a key interlocutor within ongoing process for 'Peace and Democratic Society,' and legitimate representative of the Kurdish people, the conditions must be created for Mr. Öcalan to participate fully in the process, and eventually for his freedom.

With regards to legal processes, the implementation of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) 2014 decision on the "Right to Hope" remains crucial, in recognising Mr. Öcalan's right to have his case re-assessed, and eventually to secure his freedom.

In September 2025, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe will discuss again this case, and Turkey's refusal to implement decisions of the ECtHR. This is a key opportunity for European institutions take a clear stance on this topic, and to support democratisation in Turkey. The decisions of the court, and mechanisms for their implementation are there, what is needed now is political will, action realising a commitment to democratic politics.



The right to hope is an emerging concept in international law, particularly relevant in human rights discourse. It is most prominently recognised in the context of life imprisonment and the possibility of release, as articulated by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). In cases such as *Vinter and Others v. the United Kingdom* (2013), the Court held that life sentences in which there was no possibility for the reduction of a prisoners sentence or of release was in violation of the prohibition of torture and inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights). In doing so, the judgment recognises, implicitly, the “right to hope”: that hope is an important and



constitutive aspect of the human person, strongly related to the concept of dignity. To this effect, in a concurring decision for the case Judge Power-Forde argued that to “deny them the experience of hope would be to deny a fundamental aspect of their humanity and to do that would be degrading”. While not explicitly stated in major international treaties, the right to hope is rooted in the inherent dignity of the human person, a principle enshrined in instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It intersects with rights such as:

- The right to be free from inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3, ECHR; Article 7, ICCPR)



- The right to rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners
- The right to life and human dignity

Thus, while still evolving in legal theory and practice, the right to hope serves as a moral and legal imperative that reinforces human dignity within international human rights law. It is fundamentally a right to recognition: a right to be recognised in the terms of European human rights law, and of a person's capacity to change where hope emerges as the carrier of the vision of the future.

In the context of Abdullah Öcalan's case, and the process for Peace and Democratic Society, the recognition of the 'right to hope' takes on a heightened importance and significance. In imprisoning Öcalan, the Turkish state and its co-conspirators has attempted silence and suppress the Kurdish people and the movement he started. Recognising the 'right to hope' in this context thus represents the recognition of the right of a people to live with dignity, free from degrading treatment. It becomes not only the hope and possibility for change of an individual, but of a democratic, diverse society; not only the recognition of an individual, but of a philosophy of freedom and of life that may offer solutions to many of most pressing crises of our time. It is therefore both a legal issue, as well as one of democracy and peace in recognising that Öcalan's freedom as a key factor for the political, democratic resolution of the Kurdish Question.

1998 - Öcalan leaves Syria, travels to Europe in the search for a political solution to the Kurdish Question

- 10 October 1998: Öcalan leaves Syria for Europe. He first goes to Greece, where despite having been invited by the Greek administration, he is denied entry. From there, he later travelled to Russia and several other European countries, in search of interlocutors with whom to work on a political solution to the Kurdish Question.
- November 1998: Öcalan stays in Italy for nearly 6 weeks. Thousands of Kurds travel to Italy to express their support for his efforts at finding a political solution to the Kurdish Question.



1999 – Capture, Trial & Death Sentence

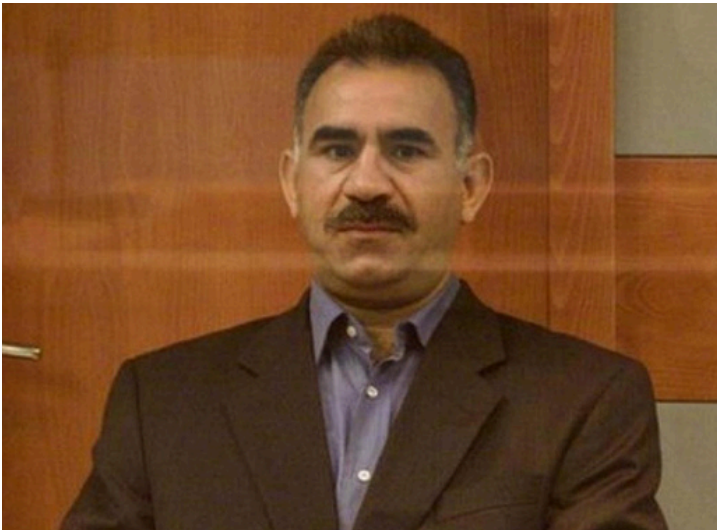
- 15 February: Öcalan was captured in Nairobi, Kenya, by an international conspiracy different Western intelligence forces and transferred to İmralı Island in Turkey.
- 16 February: Arrival at İmralı, held in isolation.
- Millions of Kurds take to the streets to protest Öcalan's imprisonment in Kurdistan around the world.
- 25 February: His first meeting with lawyers—brief and not private.
- 2 March: European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) conducts first visit.
- 11 March: First private meeting with legal counsel.
- 31 May: Trial begins before a State Security Court on İmralı.
- 29 June: Sentenced to death for treason and separatism.
- 25 November: Turkish Court of Cassation upholds the sentence.
- 30 November: European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) urges Turkey not to enact the death penalty.

2002 – Commutation to Life Imprisonment

- 9 August: Turkey abolishes the death penalty in peacetime.
- 3 October: Öcalan's death sentence commuted to life imprisonment without parole.

2003–2009 – ECtHR Rulings on Unfair Trial

- 2003: ECtHR rules Öcalan's trial was unfair—denial of legal access, military judge, lack of prompt hearing. Violations under Articles 5 and 6 (fair trial and liberty).
- 2004: Öcalan shares the first of his “defense writings”, a five volume manuscript titled “Manifesto for a Democratic Civilisation, outlining a new paradigm based on women's liberation, ecology, and democratic confederalism.
- 12 May 2005: Grand Chamber upholds the 2003 decision: violations of Articles 3, 5, and 6; orders compensation for lawyer costs (~€120,000).
- Mid 2006: Öcalan's request for retrial is rejected by domestic courts (Ankara then Istanbul)
- February 2007: Council of Europe closes supervision of execution of the judgment.



2009-2011: Oslo Process

- 2009-2011: talks are held with the goal of finding a democratic political solution to the Kurdish question. These negotiations eventually fail due to what Öcalan describes as the elimination of “conditions for conducting a democratic political struggle” by the Turkish government.
- October 2009: two peace delegations, one from Maxmur and one from Qandil, travel to Turkey to participate in the peace negotiations process.
- 2009: a new campaign, “Edi Bese,” is launched with massive support
- Nov 2011: 42 of Öcalan's lawyers arrested on terrorism-related charges.



2012–2015 – Peace Talks & Limited Contacts

- 25 June 2012: a permanent vigil outside of the Council of Europe calling for freedom Öcalan. Through summer and winter, the vigil has been held every day since. Each, week a group comes from a different place in the Kurdish diaspora.
- 2012: Hunger Strikes are organised in prisons for the freedom of Öcalan. In November 2012, Öcalan makes a call to end the hunger strike A month later it emerged that talks had recommenced with Ankara on a peace process.
- 19 July 2012: The Rojava Revolution begins, inspired by Öcalan's ideas on women's liberation and democratic confederalism.
- 3 Jan 2013: Öcalan meets Kurdish politicians (Ahmet Türk, Ayla Akat) as part of a peace initiative. These meetings continue until 2015.
- 2013: Öcalan transferred to a newer prison facility on İmralı; isolation persists.
- 18 Mar 2014: ECtHR reiterates violations: Article 3 —life sentence without parole constitutes inhuman or degrading punishment.
- 13 February 2015: 10.3 million people around the world sign a petition demanding freedom for Öcalan. In an earlier stage of this campaign, an additional 3.6 million people had signed the petition (brining the total to 13.9 million signatures).
- 5 Apr 2015: Turkish state ends peace process abruptly.

2016-2023 - Legal Restrictions & Isolation Intensify

- 2016-2025: Several cities in Italy grant Öcalan honorary citizenship, including: Naples, Palermo, Reggio Emilia, Castel del Giudice Castelbottaccio, Fossalto, Berceto, and Martano
- 8 Nov 2018: Leyla Güven begins a hunger strike protesting Öcalan's isolation; thousands join.
- Early 2019: A hunger strike lasting 200 days is organised in prison and in front of the Council of Europe, calling for the freedom of Öcalan.



- January 2019: 50 Nobel Laureates sign a letter calling for an end to the isolation of Abdullah Öcalan.
- 2019: Multiple lawyer and family visits resume; eighth CPT visit occurs in May.
- 2022 (Sept): CPT conducts ninth visit; Turkey refuses to publish the report.
- 2021 (March) - 2024 (October): Öcalan is held in incommunicado detention for 43 months.
- October 2023: a new campaign "Freedom for Öcalan, Political Solution to the Kurdish Question" begins.
- Summer 2024: 69 Nobel laureates sign and send a letter to international institutions and the Turkish President, calling for the isolation of Öcalan to be ended.
- Despite heavy attacks, PKK guerrilla continue to successfully resist in defense of their territories, proving that they cannot be eliminated through military means.





Late 2024 – 2025 – Political Engagement & Call for Disarmament

- 23 October 2024: First family visit in nearly four years by Ömer Öcalan MP.
- 28 December 2024: DEM Party delegation visit.
- 22 January 2025: Another DEM delegation visit.
- 27 February 2025: Extended DEM delegation and lawyer visit. Öcalan publicly calls for PKK's disarmament and dissolution.

March–May 2025 – PKK Response & Ceasefire

- 1 March 2025: PKK announces conditional ceasefire and future disarmament, conditioned on Öcalan's release.

- May 12 2025: PKK formally declares its dissolution.
- Summer 2025: 88 Nobel laureates sign a letter to international institutions and the Turkish President, supporting the peace process and calling for Öcalan's freedom.
- July 11 2025: Symbolic burning of weapons by PKK fighters under inter national supervision.

While in prison, Öcalan authored a five-volume "Manifesto for a Democratic Civilisation", proposing a new sociology of freedom and paradigm for the democratic self-organisation of society based on principles of women's liberation, ecology, and democratic nation. In the context of the new process for 'Peace and Democratic Society' Öcalan put forward new proposals for building a "democratic society" through "democratic politics" and "holistic law" in a new book titled "Manifesto for Peace and Democratic Society".



On February 27th, 2025, Kurdish peoples' leader Abdullah Öcalan put forth a call for "Peace and a Democratic Society", advocating for the resolution of the Kurdish question through political, democratic means. To this effect, he called for the laying down of arms, presupposed on the recognition of democratic politics and a legal framework through which all actors could together work towards a solution. He proposes that "respect for identities, the right to free expression, and the ability to organise democratically – allowing every segment of society to shape its own socio-economic



and political structures –can only be realised through the existence of a democratic society and political space.” This call received widespread international support from international institutions, including from the UN Secretary General, as well as political parties, civil society organisations, and social movements.

In the months following this call, through the initiative of Mr. Öcalan and the Kurdish society significant steps have been taken towards the resolution of the Kurdish question. From the 5th to 7th of May, the PKK held its Congress, resulting in the end of armed

The Process for Peace and Democratic Society: Resolution of the Kurdish Question through Democratic Politics



struggle, the dissolution of the PKK, and the continuation of the struggle for democracy in Kurdistan through political means. Within the Turkish Parliament, there have been proposals for the formation of a multi-partisan parliamentary commission to oversee the process for democratisation in Turkey through the resolution of the Kurdish question. Calls have come from all political tendencies within Turkey, as well from the international community and public in support of this new process. For example, a wide range of academics and intellectuals voiced their support campaign "I Want to Visit Öcalan".



Conferences have been held in Rome, Istanbul, Amed, Brussels, and elsewhere to discuss the topic and propose potential projects and solutions. In June, 88 Nobel laureates endorsed a letter to international institutions, supporting the process and calling for the freedom of Abdullah Öcalan.

However, there remains a concerning lack of engagement on the part of the Turkish Government, both as it relates to inaction in the current process, and in pursuing increasingly authoritarian approaches towards society and continuing military attacks against Kurdish regions.

The Process for Peace and Democratic Society: Resolution of the Kurdish Question through Democratic Politics



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To date there have been little to no concrete changes in the imprisonment conditions of Mr. Öcalan regarding the recognition of his rights. Three additional political prisoners were brought to Imrali island prison to be able to work with Mr. Öcalan, yet the time they can spend together is limited. While political delegations have been allowed to visit him in the last months, visits from his lawyers remain forbidden. Two ad-hoc family visits occurred within the last months for religious holidays, but the right to regular visits with family members, and contact via telephone are still restricted.



Legal and political pathways must be created in order to find a resolution to the Kurdish question. For Turkey to become democratic, it must resolve the Kurdish issue on a democratic basis. Peace is only possible through democratic politics. Kurdish peoples' leader Abdullah Öcalan must be physically freed. He must be enabled to actively engage in politics; to coordinate and guide the Process of Peace and Democratic Society.

The success of this process would have sweeping implications for the broader region, opening the way for similar processes for peace and the strengthening of democratic societies. In the context of a Middle East increasingly consumed by wars between nation-states at the expense of peoples of the region, insisting on peace, and democratic self-governance not only takes on a heightened importance, but shows a "third way" offering solutions to many of the current crises.

A strong participation of all parts of society, both locally and internationally is also needed—it is not without a reason that Mr. Öcalan calls this new process as one of "democratic society". If the process is embraced by the opposition, civil society organisations, women, young people, and all strata of society, we can move the process out of the deadlock of current governmental politics, and towards a real and lasting peace. By strengthening democratic values, democratic forces within society will be able to actively engage in the process:

discussing and developing methods, setting the agenda, and putting forward projects for practical solutions. In this light, we put forward the following demands:

1. The 2014 European Court of Human Rights decision *Öcalan v. Turkey* must be implemented, especially regarding changes in Turkish law concerning the right to hope, which holds that life imprisonment without the possibility of release is a violation of the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment.
2. Turkey must free Mr. Abdullah Öcalan. The physical freedom of Mr. Öcalan, the architect of this peace process, is necessary for the resolution of the Kurdish Question. He must be allowed to participate in political processes, to communicate freely with his lawyers, the press, political parties and representatives, civil society organisations, and other actors.
3. The Grand National Assembly of Turkey must take concrete political and legal steps towards democratisation and the recognition of rights of Kurds in Turkey to promote and protect equality among all peoples of the country.

4. EU member states and other international actors should encourage Turkey to take immediate action to participate honestly in this process, applying diplomatic pressure and offering mediation efforts to ensure that Turkey upholds democratic principles, ceases military hostilities, and commits to a credible, inclusive, and internationally supported peace process.

5. Turkey, EU member states, the United States, and other relevant countries should delist the PKK, and end the unjust criminalization of Kurds. This will open the way for the success of the new process.



