

Exiled HDP officials issue urgent call for Leyla Guven

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A group of exiled People's Democratic Party (HDP) politicians has issued a statement calling on the German government to take action for imprisoned HDP MP Leyla Guven, who has been on hunger strike for 69 days protesting the isolation of imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan. The full text of the statement is published below.

As HDP politicians forced to live in exile in Germany, we are tremendously concerned about the political situation in Turkey. Turkey is experiencing its darkest phase in terms of democratic opposition, freedom of thought and expression, freedom of the press and core human rights since the time of very foundation. The dictatorial and fascist policies are taking on worse and worse features every per day. The politicians in Turkey are exposed to strong repression. Countless activists, mayors, elected representatives, journalists, and academics etc. were arrested. Despite the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, Selahattin Demirtaş continues to be

detained. And before the upcoming municipal elections on March 31, the Turkish government is again stoking an ultranationalist mood in the country, which endangers any sort of peaceful coexistence of peoples.

For example, the AKP is currently threatening to begin a military occupation assault at any moment in order to eliminate the democratic self-government of the Kurdish people in Syria. The consequences would be similarly fatal as in the illegal entry of Turkey into North Syria's Afrin region last January of 2018. There, so called jihadist gangs are now wreaking havoc and committing war crimes on a daily basis. Should there be another campaign by the Turkish army in northern Syria, pictures worse to those in Afrin are to be expected. And again, it could be assumed that German weapons would also be used in the event of such a Turkish invasion!

In such a heated political atmosphere, the co-chair of the largest civil society institution in the Kurdish region, the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) and HDP MP from Hakkari province Leyla Guven (55) has decided to go on a hunger strike. The only and unique demand of her hunger strike, which has now reached its 69th day, is the lifting of absolute isolation against Mr Abdullah Ocalan based on the possibility and probability of his capacity to transform this bloody deadlock into a new peace process. In addition, MP Leyla Guven is the only representative in the history of the Turkish Republic who has been elected a member of parliament and has not yet been released from prison to carry out her duties.

The main representative of the Kurdish society, Abdullah Ocalan, has been imprisoned since 1999 in the maximum security level prison on the island of Imralı in the sea of Marmara. Since July 27, 2011, the Turkish state has barred its lawyers from accessing their client and from his family's, his brother has last been allowed to visit him on September 11, 2016 for only half an hour after a hunger strike campaign by HDP politicians.

Mr Ocalan remains the most important partner for a political solution of the Kurdish cause, and thus the democratization of Turkey. Already in 2012, almost 10,000 political prisoners in Turkey had gone on hunger strike to demand an end to Ocalan's isolation conditions. At that time, the collective resistance from the prisons of Turkey let the government to first time unblock the isolation with Ocalan, and then conduct peace talks with him between 2013 and 2015. Despite the ambiguity and hesitating habits of the Turkish state, Ocalan held the peace option until the end. But finally, Erdogan personally ended the peace process unilaterally!

Since the failed coup in July 2016, the Bursa Court uses the declared state of emergency to deny Mr. Ocalan from any of his fundamental rights. For example, all means of communication, such as letters, faxes or telephone calls, are prohibited

indefinitely and invariably. The decrees issued in connection with the coup attempt allowed the State to implement the unlawful measures. Basically, Imrali has been in a state of emergency for two decades.

The isolation measures have been regularly submitted to the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), which is linked to the Council of Europe. But so far, the CPT refuses to take action in this case and to visit Imrali prison. For 30 days now, 15 major Kurdish activists, including the former HDP deputy from Urfa province Ms. Dilek Ocalan, have been on hunger strike protesting the inaction of the CPT in Strasbourg. Her claim is also the break of the isolation conditions on Imrali.

The former peace talks that took place between the Turkish government and Mr. Ocalan via other HDP politicians until April 2015 were ended by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in July 2015 and replaced by a bloody war that continues to this day. Dialogue, political discussion, pluralism and fundamental rights are all completely abolished.

The co-chair of the Democratic Society Congress, HDP MP, and former mayor, Leyla Guven, was arrested and detained on January 22, 2018, for her criticism of the invasion of the Turkish army against the North Syrian canton of Afrin and further statements. At a hearing before a court in Diyarbakir on November 7, 2018, she declared: "Today the policy of isolation against Mr. Ocalan is imposed not only on him, but in his person to the whole society. Isolation is a crime against humanity. I am going to start an indefinite hunger strike to protest the isolation on Mr. Ocalan. I will not defend myself in court from now on. I will continue to protest until the judiciary has ended its illegal decisions, and this isolation policy is over. If necessary, I will allow this protest to end in death."

Leyla Guven has come dangerously close to this deadly situation at the moment. In addition to blood pressure fluctuations, nausea and headache, she now complains of stomach cramps and high sensitivity to light and volume effects. Because of her state of health, she can not even leave and walk from her cell.

Meanwhile, under the motto "Leyla Guven's demand is our demand", her hunger strike has spread worldwide, both inside and outside the prisons. At least 189 political prisoners are currently on hunger strike in Turkish prisons. Most recently, we have already been informed that two detained former MPs and leading women politicians, our friends Selma Irmak and Sebahat Tuncel joined the hunger strike today, on 14 January.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that Leyla Guven, co-chair of the

DTK, will have an impact on Turkey in the event of a fatal hunger strike, such as Bobby Sand's hunger strike on Ireland and the UK. Confidence in democratic politics will be a heavy blow in this case. Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution states that international treaties have priority by Turkish law. And isolation is incompatible with any articles of these international charters.

In this sense, as exiled politicians of the HDP, we kindly call on all political parties represented in the Federal Parliament, with the exception of the AfD:

— to address the urgent issue of hunger strike in Turkish prisons and the demands of hunger strikers;

— to take action for the critical health situation of detained HDP MP Leyla Guven and use public statements to put pressure on the Turkish government;

— to show solidarity with the hunger strikers, send human rights delegations to Turkey, and make requests for visits to the hunger-striker prisoners.

Furthermore,

— we call on the Federal Government and the German Foreign Ministry to use their political influence upon their important ally in order to put a stop to the escalation policy of the Turkish government. This includes an end to the isolationist conditions of Abdullah Ocalan, as well as encouraging for a restart of peace talks with him.

Finally,

— we would like to appeal to the German public and the German media to address the urgent issue of hunger strikes and a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. We know that silence and disinterest can cause deadly humanitarian crimes in this case!

Yours sincerely,

HDP Germany Representation

Mr. Ahmet Yildirim, MP from 2015 - 2018

Ms. Besime Konca, MP from 2015 - 2018

Mr. Burhan Kocaman, co-mayor of Karakocan from 2014 - 2017 deposed by the AKP

Mr. Faysal Sariyildiz, MP from 2011 - 2018

Ms. Dilek Ocalan, MP from 2015 - 2018

Mr. Hatip Dicle, MP and former DTK Co-Chair

Mr. Hasip Kaplan, MP from 2007 - 2015

Mr. Hasan Basri FÄ±rat, co-mayor of HÄ±nÄ±s 2014 - 2017, deposed by the AKP

Mr. Huseyin Gunes, co-mayor of Varto from 2014 - 2016, deposed by the AKP

Ms. Leyla Birlik, MP from 2015 - 2018

Ms. Leyla Imret, co-mayor of Cizre of 2014 - 2016, deposed by the AKP

Mr. Lezgin Botan, MP from 2011 - 2018

Ms. Nursel Aydogan, MP from 2011 - 2018

Mr. Orhan Sansal, co-mayor of Suruç from 2014 - 2016, deposed by the AKP

Ms Sibel Yigitalp, MP from 2015 - 2018

Ms Tuba Hezer, MP from 2015 - 2018

Mr. Ziya Pir, MP from 2015 - 2018