

Dear friends and colleagues,

Dear academics, intellectuals and philosophers,

I write from the Kurdish hunger strike in Strasbourg to ask you for your support in our demand that the Kurdish leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who has been held in solitary confinement for the last twenty years, be allowed his basic human rights.

I am an Irish citizen, and with 13 other political activists, including a lawyer, a former MP, a politician, an intellectual and a journalist, I have been on indefinite hunger strike in Strasbourg since 17 December. We based ourselves here because it is the home of the Council of Europe. There are now over 300 Kurds on indefinite hunger strike in different places, many of them political prisoners in Turkey. The hunger strikes were begun by imprisoned MP, Leyla Guven on 7 November. The aim of our action is to end the inhumane isolation that the Turkish state has imposed on Ocalan. We demand that he be allowed his right to regular visits by his family members and lawyers, as required by international law on human rights and Turkey's own constitution.

Ocalan is not an ordinary political prisoner. First, he is a political figure revered by millions of Kurds as their rightful leader, who has dedicated his life to Kurdish emancipation from the brutal, internal colonialism practised by Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Second, he is a political theorist whose philosophy gave shape to what we see now in Northern Syria (Rojava); a democratic, multi-cultural and feminist society that has been admired by progressive forces throughout the world. Third, he has been the most vocal politician in Turkey urging for peace and a democratic solution to the Kurdish conflict. To silence a political figure such as Ocalan is to silence the most vital voice for peace in Turkey.

You may rightfully ask, why would you put your life in danger? The answer is straightforward: Europe's indifference towards the Kurdish issue in general and the Ocalan case in particular, has left us with no alternative. The continued failures of European institutions, such as the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and the Council of Europe, to carry out their duty are forcing us, as European citizens, to embark on this fatal course. Their failure to act points to a crisis of democracy and loss of humane values, and they will be responsible for any fatality. Ultimately, the European institutions need to do much more than support our simple demand, but what we ask should be a practical, attainable first step.

So long as our demand is not met, we will not end our strike. The prospect of death does not scare us away from our protest. We understand that we, as humans, are accountable for the

world we live in. We, together, have the power to decide what that world looks like. We choose not to accept the global retreat from democracy. We choose to push back against the deafening silence and indifference to inhumanity.

As a young political philosopher who taught at University College Dublin (UCD), and on behalf of more than 300 hunger strikers, I call upon you to urge the European institutions to hear the call of their citizens - who may perish at any moment in Strasbourg - and to fulfil their responsibility, set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, to help lift the isolation imposed on Ocalan before it is too late.

Kardo Bokanî

Strasbourg

18 February 2019

Kardo Bokanî obtained his PhD in political philosophy from University College Dublin (UCD) where he taught for three years. His major publications include:

- [\[The Kurdish Case, An Exceptional Case\]](#) □□□□
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- [Social Communication and Kurdish Political Mobilisation in Turkey, 2017](#)

An open letter to the Council of Europe and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture from European Academics

If you would like to sign this letter, please email your name and institution (if you have one) to toscottishsolidaritywithkurdistan@outlook.com and mark it fao Sarah. We plan to send it by 25 February at the latest.

We are writing to you as European academics who are deeply concerned at the lack of concrete action by the Council of Europe and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture with respect to Turkey's continued denial of Abdullah Ocalan's basic human right to be visited by his family and his lawyers. We appreciate your recent report on this issue, but if it is to be more than hollow words it needs to be followed up by action in the European Court of Human Rights, and the CPT must insist on their right to visit Ocalan in prison, and then promptly publish their report and put pressure on Turkey to act on its findings.

Ocalan is recognised as their leader by millions of Kurds, and you don't have to be Kurdish to recognise the huge impact of his ideas in bringing democratic practices to Northern Syria, building bridges between different ethnic groups and - especially - ensuring women can take a full part in society. In the last two decades, Ocalan has made repeated attempts to negotiate a peaceful and respectful future for the Kurds in Turkey, and the respect that he himself commands makes his role vital to any peace settlement between the Kurds and the Turkish Government.

Ocalan's importance extends well beyond the Kurdish community, but the immediate issue is simply a matter of the abuse of human rights by a member of the Council of Europe. Ocalan's isolation contravenes European Human Rights legislation, the UN Mandela Rules for the minimum treatment of political prisoners, and Turkey's own constitution.

As you will know, over 300 Kurds have responded to the world's failure to take heed of this by going on indefinite hunger strike. 14 of them are in Strasbourg because they believe that the Council of Europe can and should be acting to help. One of those 14 is our academic colleague, Dr Kardo Bokanî, who is an Irish citizen and taught political philosophy at University College Dublin. As the weeks wear on, their strength and health is visibly failing.

This demand for help is putting to the test European democracy and civilised values. Dr Bokanî and his fellow hunger strikers in Strasbourg have put their lives on the line in the belief that the Council of Europe and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture will act to support basic human rights. They are prepared to take their hunger strike through to the end, but they do not want to die. We urge you not to let them down, and not to let down the fundamental principles on which these institutions are founded.

[http://www.sskonline.org.uk/an-open-letter-to-the-council-of-europe-and-the-committee-for-t
he-prevention-of-torture-from-european-academics-2/](http://www.sskonline.org.uk/an-open-letter-to-the-council-of-europe-and-the-committee-for-the-prevention-of-torture-from-european-academics-2/)