



## Kurdish Human Rights Action Group South Africa

Your Excellency  
United States Secretary of State  
Ms Hillary Rodham Clinton  
3 August 2012

### AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MS HILLARY CLINTON

We are writing to you this open letter regarding the Kurds, a people of over 40 million, and its incarcerated leader, Abdullah Öcalan.

In 1999, your government, through the CIA, abducted the revered and popular Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan, who was on his way to South Africa to seek political asylum. He was abducted in Kenya and handed over to the Turkish authorities. This was supposed to bring an end to the uprising of the Kurds in Turkey who have been fighting for their basic democratic rights for decades. But the Kurds cannot be expected to relinquish their most basic human rights like full citizenship rights, freedom of expression, freedom of association or the use of the Kurdish language as their mother-tongue in public schools.

Ocalan was arbitrarily sentenced to death in an unfair trial but his sentence was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment. He has been under isolation under atrocious conditions ever since. The first eleven years of his unjustified imprisonment, he spent as the only prisoner on Imrali Island, guarded by more than a thousand soldiers. For the past 12 months, he has been cut off completely from the outside world. Neither his lawyers nor family members nor anybody else has been allowed to visit him. This is a clear violation of international human rights instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the European Convention on Human Rights.

In the last few years other peoples have rebelled and demanded their basic rights. Your government has supported some of the uprising and opposed others. Nowhere is this as contradictory as in the case of the Kurds, the world's largest people without a state. The Kurds' struggle for basic human and political rights in Turkey has constantly been ignored, opposed or even suppressed by your government.

In Turkey, today dozens of democratically elected Mayors are in prison as well as more than a hundred journalists and lawyers. All in all, more than 6000 Kurdish activists are in jail as political prisoners. All of them demand nothing more than basic human, cultural and political rights for the Kurdish people. If the US still purports to hold the torch of liberty high, it is obligated to call for free press and the release of journalists, the release of all unjustly arrested lawyers and political prisoners, especially those who have been democratically elected.

But not all hope is lost. Between 2008 and 2011, the Turkish state has already inconclusively negotiated with its most prominent political prisoner, Abdullah Öcalan, and his organization, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which your government has unfortunately labeled "terrorist". They are regarded by us as freedom fighters in terms of International law and not terrorists. Öcalan has presented a number of moderate and reasonable proposals for a peaceful political solution of the Kurdish issue in Turkey in his Road Map to Negotiations. The Turkish government has implicitly acknowledged his role as the negotiation leader on the Kurdish issue. But we say that like Mandela, Öcalan cannot negotiate in chains.

The US should not become complicit to any further harm to Öcalan's health and well-being. Your government bears the moral responsibility for his unlawful incarceration. Today, your government could correct the tragic mistake of 1999 and support the Kurds' demand for their political and human rights. In particular, it should support the Kurdish people's demand for the release of Abdullah Öcalan. His contribution is crucial for a peaceful, political solution of the Kurdish issue. Öcalan's freedom will be a breakthrough for democracy and peace in the Middle East.

With best regards  
Justice Essa Moosa Chairperson and  
Reverend Mathew Esau, Vice-Chairperson of the  
Kurdish Human Rights Action Group, South Africa