

of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) agreed to visit Imrali Island to investigate Öcalan's health.

### Long March

From 1 February 2012 on, about 200 Kurds and their supporters marched the 400 kilometres from Geneva to Strasbourg in a "Long March for Freedom". The march con-



by Rojlog | art-for-ocalan.org/

## Öcalan's efforts for Peace

### Ceasefires

Öcalan has been the driving force behind the shift in the Kurdish freedom movement from a predominantly military to a predominantly political and peaceful strategy. Since the first unilateral cease-fire in 1993 he has been working for a political solution. In 1995 and 1998 he initiated two more unilateral cease-fires.

A major shift came in 1999 when – against great difficulties – Öcalan managed to convince his movement to commit itself to a peaceful solution and to withdraw all armed forces from Turkish territory. This marked the beginning of the longest cease-fire in the history of the conflict which lasted for five years.

### Peace groups

In a surprising move, in 1999 Öcalan suggested that two "peace groups" consisting of PKK members should return to Turkey as a

tinued for 18 days in extremely cold weather. It was a protest against the renewed total isolation of Öcalan and the other prisoners on Imrali Island.

### 2012 Hunger Strike

From 1 March 2012 on, 15 Kurdish activists started an indefinite hunger strike in Strasbourg, France, in the rooms of a church parish to protest against Öcalan's isolation. The hunger strike lasted for 52 days.

### Permanent "Freedom for Öcalan" Vigil

On 25 June 2012 Kurds began holding a daily vigil in front of the Council of Europe building in Strasbourg. They are calling for Öcalan to be given his freedom and are resolved to continue the vigil until this goal is achieved.

sign of readiness for a peaceful solution. The groups – one consisting of unarmed guerrilla fighters and the others of Kurdish activists from Europe – indeed arrived in Turkey. All members, however, were arrested and served long prison terms.

Ten years later, in 2009, Öcalan called for another peace group. Another group of unarmed guerrilla fighters and a group of refugees from the Mexmûr refugee camp crossed the border from Iraq to Turkey. They were not arrested immediately but welcomed ecstatically by Kurds who hoped that "the war had finally ended" (as some newspapers headlined it). Later, however, many members of the peace groups were arrested and received prison sentences.

### Prison writings

While in prison, Öcalan authored numerous books some of which have been transla-

ted. Starting with the defence speech in the show-trial at Imali Island that would lead to his death sentence, Öcalan consistently argues against secessionism and for a peaceful coexistence of the peoples without changing the political borders. In the numerous books that he authored while in prison he developed these arguments even further. Despite the inhuman conditions under which he being held at the Imrali prison, Öcalan is to this day using his energy to work for a peaceful resolution to the Kurdish question as far as his conditions permit. His visions and strategies had a major influence on Kurdish politics in the last decades.

### Road map for negotiations

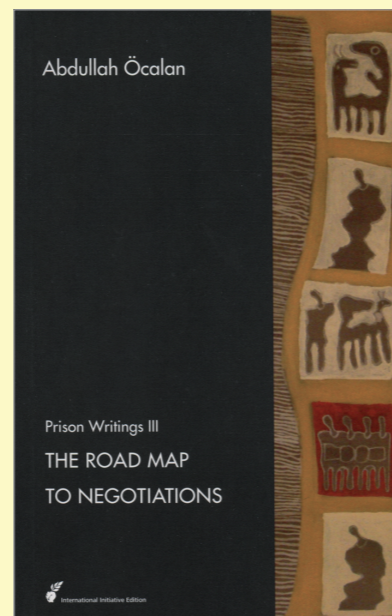
In 2009 Öcalan announced that he was going to write a "road map" and made a call for suggestions and opinions. This sparked a

## The current situation

### No right to defence

Defending Öcalan has always been a difficult task. His lawyers have been harassed and threatened for a long time. They have faced numerous lawsuits and many have been banned from the case under a punitive new law. Numerous applications to the European Court of Human Rights remain pending due to the conditions of Öcalan's imprisonment, some since 2003.

In November 2011 several law offices were raided by the police and files relating to the



wide debate inside Turkey. He completed the road map on the 25th anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle. The state authorities, however, confiscated the text. It was published in English in 2012.

### The "Oslo Process"

From 2009 until mid-2011, secret negotiations were held between Öcalan, a government-appointed delegation of the Turkish state and senior PKK members (the so-called "Oslo Process"). Based on the "Road Map" drawn up by Abdullah Öcalan, three protocols were agreed on. These protocols contained a phased plan for an end of the conflict and a political solution to the Kurdish issue. The Turkish government, however, chose not to implement the plan and started even larger waves of arrests than previously and major military operations in June 2011.

ongoing ECtHR cases were confiscated. 36 lawyers who represented Öcalan were arrested in an unprecedented attempt to deprive him of the right to legal defence, a crucial right under the international rule of law. Most of the lawyers are still in prison; their trial has begun and is being internationally observed.

### Renewed isolation – an ongoing human rights violation

After the government broke off the "Oslo Process", the isolation has been aggravated.

Since 27 July 2011 the prisoners on Imrali Island have been completely isolated from the outside world. Almost two years have passed without a consultation with lawyers, written communication or telephone calls. This is the longest period of total isolation during the 14 years that Imrali has served as a "maximum security prison".

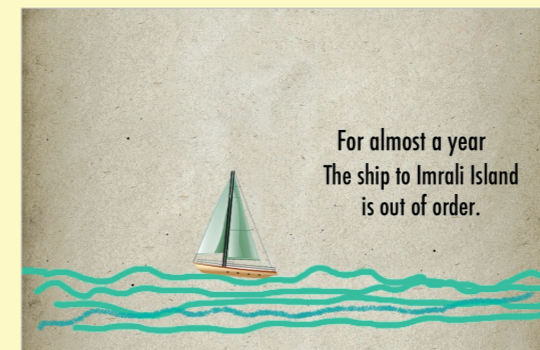
In 2012 thousands of political prisoners conducted a hunger strike directed among other things against these abuses at Imrali and broadly supported by the Kurdish society. The hunger strike seems to have reached one of its main goals: the government took up talks with Öcalan once again. Since January 2013 some deputies of the pro-Kurdish BDP have been able to visit Öcalan sporadically – however, lawyers still cannot. Therefore this small crack in the isolation remains an arbitrary measure and poses no guarantee for the future.

### After the landmark Newroz speech

On 21 March 2013 a message by Abdullah Öcalan was read out to a crowd of thousands at the Kurdish Newroz celebrations, in which he made a call to all peoples and sections of society to participate in building not just a new Turkey but a new Middle East. He also called on the Kurdish guerrilla forces to withdraw from within Turkey and to continue the struggle only politically. These calls were received enthusiastically – and have been followed so far. Since May 2013 the guerrillas have been withdrawing from Turkey. Hopes for a

real peace process have never been stronger. But for real progress the government will have to take some serious steps.

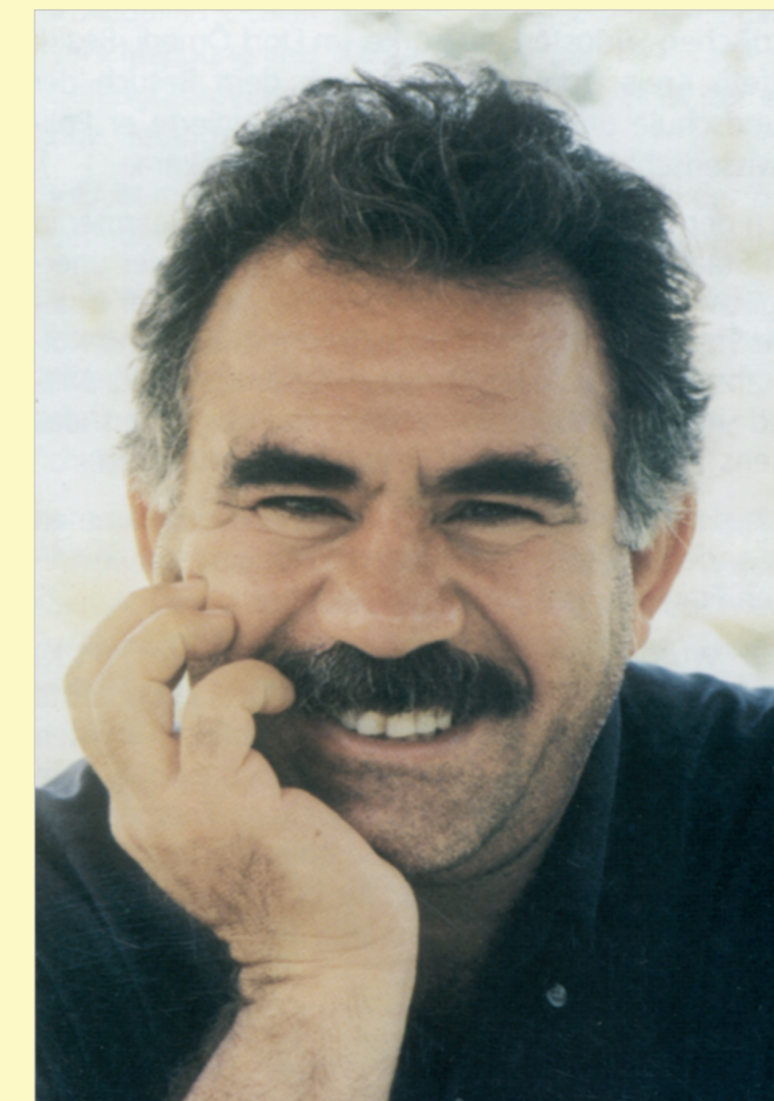
One man stands in the centre of this process: Abdullah Öcalan. He is accepted by



"Ship to Imrali" by Yekbûn | art-for-ocalan.org/

friends and foe as the national leader and political representative of the Kurdish people. He is the most high-profile Kurdish politician. More than 3.5 million Kurds have signed a declaration recognising him as their political representative. TIME magazine chose him to be among the 100 most influential persons in 2013. The campaign for his freedom has already collected 750.000 signatures abroad. Everybody now agrees that a political solution to the Kurdish issue has to be negotiated with him.

However, a real peace process can only be realised if both parties negotiate on an equal footing. This is not possible as long as Öcalan is in prison. His freedom will be the ultimate test of serious commitment from the Turkish government and an important cornerstone of a lasting peace.



# Who is Abdullah Öcalan?



### International Initiative

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## Biographical notes

Abdullah Öcalan was born to a poor family in 1949 in the village of Amara (Turkish: Ömerli), situated in the province of Urfa in the Kurdistan region of Turkey. Once he finished his primary and secondary schooling he progressed onto working as a civil servant in the city of Diyarbakir. From there he enrolled onto the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Ankara.

Affected by the Turkish government's apparent denial and suppression of the Kurdish identity and cultural rights coupled with their impoverished social and economic conditions, Öcalan decided to conduct research into the Kurdish issue along with his friends after the 1971 Military Coup.

In 1978 the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was established with Abdullah Öcalan being at its forefront until today. Whilst he focused his work primarily on the cultural and political rights of the Kurdish people, in numerous speeches and books Öcalan discussed philosophy, religion, women's liberation and ecology and developed new ideas. He has

from the outset advocated that the peoples of the Middle East live together in peace and harmony.

Öcalan left Turkey in 1979 because of the foreshadowing military coup. From abroad he continued to lead the political activities of the PKK. The devastating military coup in Turkey eventually took place in 1980, resulting in hundreds of thousands of detentions and widespread torture. The PKK prepared for armed resistance and started a guerrilla war in 1984. Realising early on that a military solution unlikely to succeed, Öcalan tried to shift the focus to a political solution in the early 1990s. However, unilateral ceasefires by the PKK were met with no response from the state. In 1990s saw the killing of more than 30,000 people, most of them Kurds. Thousands became victims of state-controlled death squads. More than 4000 Kurdish villages were destroyed, Kurds in their millions became refugees. Torture was widespread and an immense number of human rights violations of every kind were committed.



To the Free Children of the Country of the Medes by Nuri Aslan | art-for-ocalan.org/

## Abduction and imprisonment

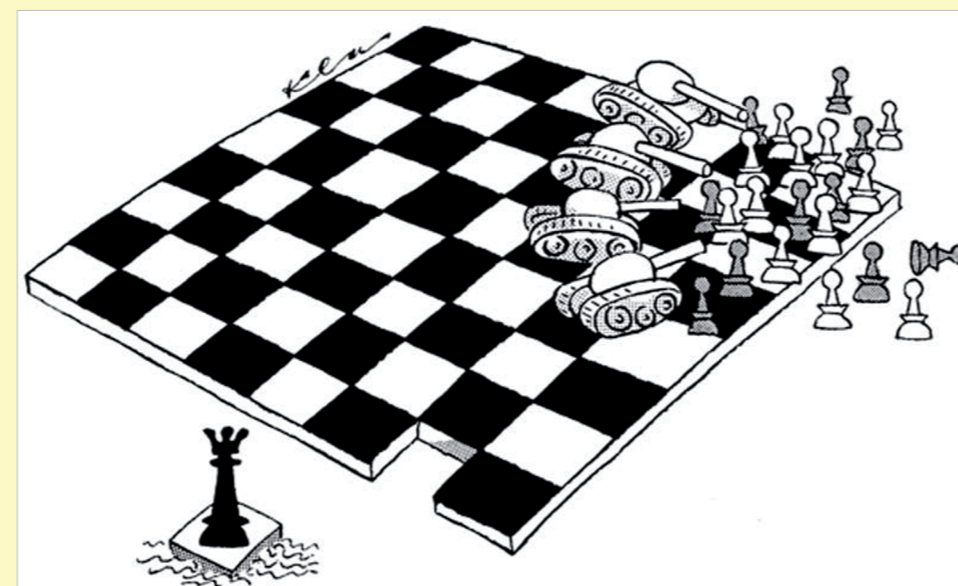
In 1998, during yet another unilateral cease-fire, Turkey threatened Syria with war. Öcalan left Syria and headed for Europe to promote a political solution. Italy, where he stayed for three months, came under massive pressure from Turkey and its NATO allies.

Öcalan left Italy again and later headed for South Africa, but he never got there. On 15 February 1999 he was abducted in Kenya and handed over to the Turkish state following a clandestine operation backed by an alliance of secret services directed by their governments acting in close cooperation. The abduction sparked outrage and major protests from Kurds all over the world. Turkey saw an un-

precedented rise of anti-Kurdish nationalism which brought the country to the brink of civil war.

Öcalan was brought to a prison island, Imrali, which had been evacuated. From 1999 to 2009 he was the sole inmate of the prison, living in constant isolation, guarded by more than 1000 soldiers.

In prison he has authored numerous books in the form of submissions to various courts. 12 of them have been published. Some of them were translated into English, German and Italian. Several texts are also available in French, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese.



"Imrali Chess" by Klaus Becher | art-for-ocalan.org/

## Trial and death penalty

On 29 June 1999, after a short trial, Öcalan was sentenced to death. The trial was deemed "unfair" by a Grand Chamber judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in 2005.

The death penalty was abolished in Turkey in 2002 and his sentence commuted into "aggravated life-long imprisonment" without the possibility of parole – in other words: prison until death.

## Imprisonment conditions

Öcalan's prison conditions are without precedence in Europe. He is facing a regime of isolation and arbitrary regulation.

### The island

Imrali Island is located in the Sea of Marmara between the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, on the border between Europe and Asia. Imrali has been used as a prison island for a long time. In 1961, the first freely elected prime minister of Turkey, Adnan Menderes, was executed on the island after a military coup. The famous film director Yılmaz Güney was also once imprisoned here. The whole island has been declared a prohibited area. The passage by boat is long and exhausting for visitors.

### The prison

The prison that Abdullah Öcalan and five other prisoners are currently held in was built in 2009. All cells are solitary confinement cells. Every prisoner has a separate yard for exercise. The walls around these small yards are extremely high, giving the prisoner the impression of being at the bottom of a well.

### Isolation and arbitrariness

Long term isolation and solitary confinement are designed to break prisoners psychologically and physically. It is therefore regarded as "white torture".

During eleven years as the only prisoner on Imrali Island, Öcalan was not allowed to touch anyone. Even handshakes were forbid-

den. He still cannot receive letters from the outside world. He is the only prisoner in Turkey without any access to a telephone.

Most of the time, Öcalan could only receive visits from his siblings for 30 minutes per month and consult his lawyers for at most an hour per week. However these consultations

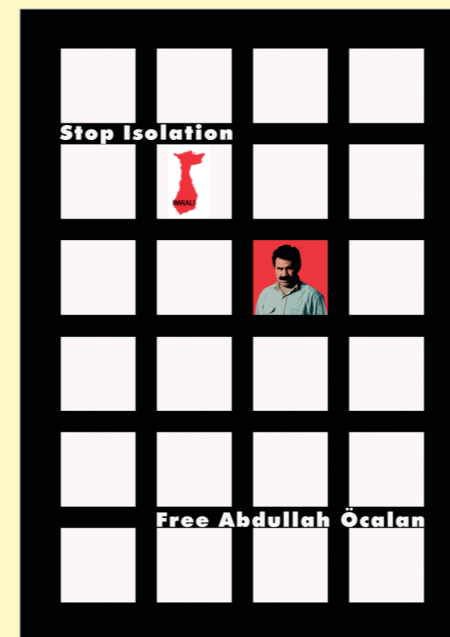
were often blocked by the state and sometimes do not take place for months, resulting in a total isolation on the Island. This fact especially has been criticised heavily by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), Council of Europe's anti-torture committee.

The prison regime of Imrali Island is guided by arbitrariness in many ways. Consultation between lawyer and client are overheard and recorded regularly without a legal basis.

### The European Guantanamo

The inhumane isolation conditions on Imrali Island have sparked wide criticism by international human rights institutions. Council of Europe's anti-torture watchdog CPT has produced an unprecedented number of reports on Imrali Island Prison, more than on any other detention facility ever. CPT criticises heavily the isolation conditions that Abdullah Öcalan and the five other prisoners are kept in.

The conditions at Imrali Island Prison have earned it the title "European Guantanamo".



"Stop Isolation" by A. Bender | art-for-ocalan.org/

## Protests and campaigns

Since Öcalan was driven out of Syria in 1998, countless protests have taken place in Kurdistan, Turkey and abroad against his abduction, against the death penalty, against the isolation regime on Imrali Island, for Öcalan's health, to support his political role and finally against the renewed total isolation since July 2011. Since the sheer number of protests makes it impossible to list them all here, only some of the more remarkable protests and campaigns are mentioned.

### Self-immolations

Since 1998, numerous people in Kurdistan, in Turkish prisons and in Europe have protested against attacks on Öcalan and his isolation conditions by self-immolation. More than 100 people have died from their self-inflicted burns in the last 15 years. While Öcalan repeatedly strongly discouraged this most extreme form of protest, Kurds in their desperation have again and again chosen to sacrifice themselves.

### International Initiative "Freedom for Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan"

The International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan" was founded immediately after Öcalan's abduction to Turkey in 1999. A wide range of first signatories, among them 6 Noble Prize laureates and numerous MPs and MEPs, supported the founding statement. Focussing at first on the immediate threat of execution and later on the abolition of the death penalty in Turkey and the intolerable isolation conditions on Imrali Island, the International Initiative has ever since informed the public about Öcalan's conditions and political initiatives. The International Initiative publishes Abdullah Öcalan's works in several European languages in the form of books and brochures.

### 15 February protests

Every year around 15 February, the anniversary of Öcalan's abduction from Kenya, Kurds demonstrate in protest in Kurdistan and abroad. Tens of thousands of Kurds from all over Europe come to Strasbourg every year.

### Gemlik marches

On 9 October, the anniversary of Öcalan's forced departure from Syria in 1998, demonstrations are conducted in Gemlik, the town opposite of Imrali Island. These demonstrations have been violently attacked by fascists several times.

### Birthday celebrations

Every year on April 4th, Öcalan's birthday, Kurds flock to Amara, the village where he was born. His birthday is celebrated by planting trees.

### Kurdish Signature Campaign 2005-2006

In a signature campaign conducted in 2005-06 we saw 3.5 million people from all parts of Kurdistan signing a statement that they regard Öcalan as their political representative. This is the more remarkable as the campaign was conducted under immense restrictions and under pressure from the Turkish authorities to curb the campaign. Several people got jailed for several years for organising the campaign in Turkey. The huge number of signatures was confirmed by a Belgian notary.

### 2007 Hunger Strike

After in 2007 indications were found that Öcalan was being poisoned, a wave of protests swept over Kurdistan, Turkey and Europe. In clashes with the Turkish police several protesters were killed.

In Strasbourg, France, 18 Kurdish activists went on hunger strike. The hunger strike was only terminated after 35 days when Council