Scottish Kurds protest against Erdoğan invitation

Kurds in Scotland and their supporters have protested at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh against any invitation to Turkish state President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to visit Scotland, reports Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot.

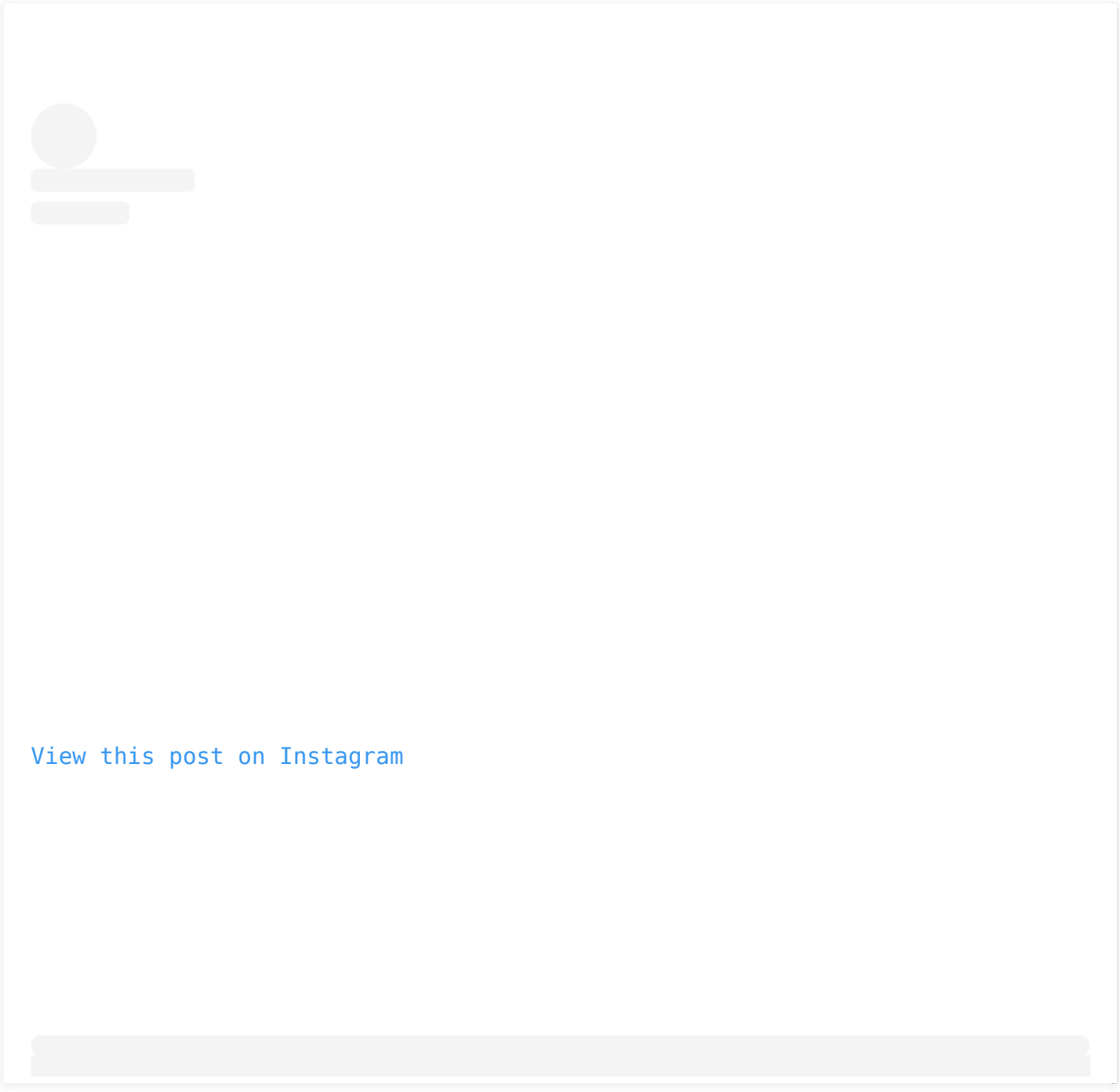
The apparent invitation arose after Scottish First Minister, and leader of the governing Scottish National Party (SNP), Humza Yousaf met briefly with the Turkish state President while they were both in Dubai in December 2023 for the COP28 summit. Kurds are angry that Erdoğan is using the Gaza crisis to launch military attacks on Kurdish populations inside both the Syrian and Iraqi state and continue his persecution and murderous policies towards the 10 million Kurds inside the Turkish state. In the Kurdish-led liberated region of Rojava in neighbouring Syria, Erdoğan has committed exactly the same sort of brutal bombing and attacks on civilian infrastructure that he accuses Israel of in Gaza.



Damage caused by Turkish air attacks on civilian electricity infrastructure in Suwaydiyah North & East Syria. Photo: Rojava Information Center

So when news that Yousaf had invited Erdoğan to Scotland came

out in the media in January 2024, Kurdish and solidarity organisations such as Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan, alongside trade unionists Mike Arnott of the Scottish TUC and Stephen Smellie of UNISON Scotland, moved swiftly to condemn the invitation by issuing a public letter of protest. The Kurdish community in Scotland organised a demonstration at the Scottish Parliament on 25 January to demand the SNP refuse to invite Erdoğan and instead condemn his regime's murderous policy against the Kurds. The protestor's views were recorded by progressive media outlet The Skotia on Instagram (video below) and the open letter of protest received wide media coverage.



A post shared by Media for a better Scotland. (@theskotia)

Prominent Glasgow SNP councillor Roza Salih, herself a refugee from Iraqi Kurdistan, had previously drawn attention to the matter in a post in December on Twitter/X in December, covered by The National daily newspaper:

> *“Humza being friendly and laughing with Erdogan is an offence to the Kurdish people”*
>
> *Roza Salih, Scotland’s first refugee councillor, has criticised Humza Yousaf for shaking hands with the Turkish president https://t.co/XHu2iH28P0*
>
> *— The National (@ScotNational) December 2, 2023*

International Movement demands release of Öcalan on 25th Anniversary of his incarceration

Meanwhile the Kurdish movement internationally is organising a global mobilisation to demand the release of Kurdish political leader, **Abdullah Öcalan**, with demonstrations across Europe up to the **25th Anniversary** of his unjust imprisonment and solitary confinement by the Turkish state. An Internationalist Long March is poised to spotlight this anniversary, beginning in



Basel-Switzerland on 10 February, and will include key events such as a conference in Strasbourg on 15 February and a pan-European demonstration in Cologne and Düsseldorf, Germany, on 17 February. SNP Westminster Member of Parliament, Tommy Sheppard, recently met with Öcalan's lawyers at the Council of Europe meeting and has written to UK government foreign secretary to call on him to take up Öcalan's incarceration by the Turkish government and demand his release (text below).

Text of Open Letter by Kurdish solidarity organisations and individuals on the invitation of Turkish president Erdoğan to Scotland

STATEMENT:
We, the undersigned, condemn the invitation that the First Minister of Scotland, Humza Yousaf, has made to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Turkish state's record on human rights abuses is well documented, both internally and externally. Women, ethnic minorities and migrants bear the brunt of its oppressive policies. In particular, the Turkish state continues a policy against the Kurdish people that seeks to suppress basic human rights and political autonomy through military force, legal repression, and assimilationist policies.

Erdogan's party destroys civilian infrastructure beyond Turkey's own borders for political leverage and to disempower an already economically disadvantaged population in Syria and Iraq. Yousaf's response to journalists was dismissive when

challenged on this. We condemn the cooperation between Erdogan and any segment of the British state. The First Minister's response to press questioning whether the invitation was "a good idea considering his treatment of the Kurds" was that "as a NATO ally", it was a legitimate invitation "if he was visiting the UK". This is hypocritical: The SNP positions itself as distinct from Westminster and with a more discerning eye towards human rights abuses and regional autonomy.

While Erdogan has been vocally supportive of Palestinians, 40% of oil imports to Israel come via Turkey, and the two governments have a long term and high value arms industry relationship that has been ongoing throughout the periods of intensification in Israeli attacks over the last decade. Erdogan does to the Kurds everything that he accuses Netanyahu of doing to the Palestinian people. Both Israel and Turkey have been crafting a Middle East where business and trade with western countries are more valuable than justice or freedom. The power to define terrorism and the legitimate use of violence are now highly developed tools to repress even the most basic self-determination of peoples.

From January 13th – 16th 2024, Turkish military forces carried out 224 ground and air strikes in north-eastern Syria, targeting agricultural and energy infrastructure such as oil fields. In nine locations, electric power stations were struck, which led to power outages and water supply issues that are currently affecting millions of people. This type of attack is a frequent but under reported reality and Erdogan is exploiting this moment when the world media is rightfully watching Gaza. The targeting of vital infrastructure is itself a war crime and these attacks are also an unprovoked act of aggression.

BAE Systems, Thales, Leonardo and other weapons manufacturing companies that have factories in Scotland supply both Israel and Turkey. In 2019, white phosphorous – banned for use as an

incendiary chemical weapon – was reported to have been used by the Turkish military in north-eastern Syria. An investigation at the time showed 70 British export licenses for phosphorous.

Domestically in Turkey, the political repression of the left-wing parliamentary party HDP has led to more than five thousand of its members being arrested, the stripping of MPs' parliamentary immunity and their imprisonment, and widespread implementation of the "trustee" system by Erdogan's party that forcibly removed all elected HDP mayors from office and replaced them with government-appointed officials. This has disproportionately affected the Kurdish people in Turkey, where attempts at democratic expression are crushed, and more than eight thousand Kurdish political prisoners are languishing in Turkish prisons. Kurdish language musicians, teachers and campaigners are often met with criminalisation – the Kurdish language is unrecognised by the Turkish parliament despite being the second most spoken language in the country, and language rights are linked to terrorism as a method of delegitimisation.

The UK government and the European Union countries have shrewdly wedded themselves to facilitating Erdogan's AKP government in exchange for the policing of Europe's land and sea borders and its imprisonment of displaced peoples subject to these "push-backs".

As residents of Scotland and members of human rights organisations, we request that the First Minister and the SNP condemn Erdogan and the AK Party for their actions. The targeting of civilian infrastructure and use of chemical weapons are war crimes, regardless of whether the state that does so is a NATO member.

We request Mr Yousaf's support in condemning these attacks on north-east Syria. We also ask him to assess the human rights abuses that the Kurdish peoples are subject to within the

state borders of Turkey and that he supports the struggle for the freedom of political prisoners in Turkey.

We are in a moment that requires brave leadership on myriad human rights abuses, the repression of the self-determination of peoples and the destruction of the earth, happening across the globe. We implore the First Minister and Scottish government, particularly in this moment, to resist shallow alliances that fail to look at the geo-political situation holistically. The moment demands an uncompromising acknowledgement of the colonial legacies of the current genocidal treatment of the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples.

We ask Mr Yousaf to meet with the Kurdish communities in Scotland and campaigners to discuss this issue. We believe that Scotland can do better and we would like to talk about how.

LIST OF SIGNATURES

Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan
Kurdish Community Scotland
Zagros Community Scotland
Women's Rights Delegation from Scotland to North and East Syria, May 2023
International Human Rights Delegation on political prisoners in Turkey, December 2023
Edinburgh University Justice for Palestine Society
Mike Arnott, President of Scottish Trades Union Congress
Stephen Smellie, Depute Convenor UNISON Scotland
International Solidarity Movement (ISM) – Scotland

Text of Letter from SNP Westminster

MP Tommy Sheppard to UK government foreign secretary David Cameron



The Rt Hon Lord David Cameron
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH
26th January 2024

Dear David

I am writing on behalf of several constituents to ask you to make representations to the Turkish Government in the case of Abdullah Ocalan.

You will know that Ocalan is regarded by millions of Kurds throughout the world as their leader and he is key to achieving a permanent and peaceful solution which respects the rights of the Kurds in Turkey and neighbouring countries.

He has been held in solitary confinement on the island prison of Imrali for almost 25 years. This is contrary to several judgements of European Court of Human Rights which have found the manner of his detention to be in violation of the statues to prohibit torture.

As a UK member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I met with Mr Ocalan's lawyers earlier this week.

They tell me that he has been denied any communication with the outside world and any visits from his legal team for almost three years now.

This case does great damage to Turkey's reputation and is an egregious breach of international human rights law. It is also a running sore and an insult to the many thousands of Kurdish people who have made this country their home.

I would ask you to take up this case with the Turkish authorities, demanding that Mr Ocalan be allowed access to his lawyers, that his isolation end, and that after a quarter of a century in solitary confinement, his case is reviewed, and plans made to end his incarceration.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Tommy Sheppard
Member of Parliament for Edinburgh East