

# Can united humanity succeed where united nations have failed? – A weekly news review

On the 75th anniversaries of the United Nations' Genocide Convention and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, faith in the power of international state institutions is at a low ebb. What is optimistically called the "international community" can be clearly seen for what it is: a coming together of state governments each with their own agenda tuned to the interests of their own elites. Western hypocrisy has been exposed, but we also cannot ignore the hypocrisy and brutality of other states, such as Turkey and Iran. The only way that the failure of international state-based organisations will be overcome is through growing our campaigns and movements on the ground, and linking them together for mutual support and to increase our understanding. Today's Öcalan Book Day is a contribution to that resistance.

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Seventy-five years ago on Saturday, the United Nations General Assembly approved the [UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#). This was a time when people believed that international organisations of states could learn from the horrors of the Second World War and provide the mechanisms for ensuring a less brutal future. The day after approving the Genocide Convention, the United Nations published their [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

On Friday, the United States yet again [vetoed](#) a United Nations resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and unconditional return of all hostages, despite a specific call for support from the UN Secretary General.

Faith in the power of international state institutions to prevent genocide and protect human rights must be lower now than at any time in the last seventy-five years. What is optimistically called the “international community” can be clearly seen for what it is: a coming together of state governments each with their own agenda tuned to the interests of their own elites. Craig Murray has [described](#) a “surreal event” at the United Nations in Geneva held as part of the celebrations of the Genocide Convention, where “Arab, African and South American states stressed the urgent need to stop the current genocide [in Gaza]; [and] developed nations stressed the need for states to control social media and counter “disinformation” and “anti-semitism”. He goes on to point out that “none of the pro-Palestinian states has fulfilled their duty and reported Israel under the Genocide Convention, thus triggering a determination by the International Court of Justice” – although it is clear from the Court’s Judgement in the case of Bosnia versus Serbia that “Every single state in the world has a positive duty to intervene to prevent the Genocide in Gaza now, not after a court has reached a determination of genocide.”

## State hypocrisy

The Gaza genocide is exposing the true face of international state politics. Statements of genocidal intent, and live-stream of the horrifying results, are clear on the screens held in billions of hands. Decades of propaganda ensure that there are still many who cannot comprehend what is happening in front of their eyes, but growing numbers have seen the hypocrisy of the western

states. States that claim to be guided by democracy, human rights and the rule of law are complicit in genocide, while disregarding the horrified protests of their citizens.

And states that lack that particular hypocrisy have proved no more helpful in preventing genocide. In the case of Turkey, President Erdoğan's strong words in support of the Palestinians have not been accompanied by even such basic actions as stopping the 40% of Israel's oil supplies that flow through the Turkish port of Ceyhan, or restricting other key Israeli trade. And every brutal action that Turkey protests when carried out by Israel, they have themselves perpetrated against the Kurds. Turkey [warned](#) Israel that there would be "serious consequences" if Israel assassinated Hamas members within Turkey, but Turkey expects no comeback for assassinating Kurds in Syria, Iraq, or even (though they deny this) Paris.

Turkish violence against the Kurds manages to slip below most people's social media radar – and has not reached the immediate brutal intensity of current events in Gaza – but Turkey, like Israel, attempts to deny the existence of a people, and to make that existence impossible through lethal force, in defiance of all those nice international laws. And Turkey, too, can rely on self-interested international support. Turkey's strategic geography allows them not only to be confident of support from the West but also to play Russia against NATO.

Every genocide has to be resisted. When states and their international institutions fail to do this, it is doubly disastrous. Whenever genocidal states get away with impunity, it makes it easier for another genocide to happen in another place.

Before I look at some of Turkey's recent attempts to destroy Kurdish existence, and at how this is being resisted, I want to apologise for a rather delayed newsletter. I am struggling with bronchitis and am under doctor's instructions to take it easy.

## Oppression in Turkey

A week ago, 110 people were detained in the province of Bitlis, and more than 50 of these have now been arrested. The local HEDEP (Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party) MP, Semra Çağlar Gökalp, has [described](#) the situation in the province to Firat News Agency: "Throughout the history of the republic, Bitlis has been one of the centres of the implementation of the policy of oppression, denial, annihilation and assimilation against the Kurdish people... People are tortured as state forces go from village to village and carry out mass arrests... vandalise people's vineyards and gardens and cut down trees... The villagers are no longer allowed to enter their pastures, they are not even allowed to go to their fields or leave the village... [S]oldiers storm the villages in the morning and detain 80-year-olds. [They want to drive the people] off their land by making their centres of life uninhabitable. The aim is to bring livestock farming and agriculture to a standstill... to destroy these economic resources of the people. Nature is being destroyed in the restricted military areas and security zones. This is a policy of systematic depopulation... The aim is to turn the region into a single military base by displacing the population. The village burnings of the 1990s are still fresh in the minds of the Kurdish people... Despite all the oppression and persecution, they could not drive us away from our land [then], and they will not be able to drive us away today. Our roots in this country are too deep for them to reach."

The continuity of oppression – through different Turkish governments – is exemplified by the failure to achieve judicial resolution for state attacks on Kurds in the 1990s. Cases are now being allowed to be closed under the thirty-year statute of limitations, though it is argued that this should not apply to crimes against humanity. The [latest case to be closed](#) concerns the death by arson of nine members, including seven children, of one Kurdish family.

The state's attacks on the Kurds do not stop after death. Last week brought yet [another account](#) of a Kurdish family receiving the remains of their Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) child only many years after their death and in a cardboard box.

Those who try and pursue Kurdish rights through normal democratic structures are far from exempt from attack. The campaigning journalist, Abdurrahman Gök, is again on trial (now further adjourned until March) with [prosecution "evidence"](#) that should be simply dismissed as absurd; and the lawyer, Ahmet Atış, was [assaulted](#) by military police for using Kurdish when speaking to his clients – striking workers who had themselves been attacked and detained by the gendarmes. A protest in Istanbul against Turkish attacks was met with police violence and the detention of 46 people. The spokesperson for HEDEP's Youth Council was left with her eye swollen shut after being [hit by a police officer](#). And in an example of everyday oppression, the government's refusal to provide health services in Kurdish has been shown to be having a [significant impact](#) on the ability of Kurdish women to access vital cancer diagnosis and treatment.

But resistance does not stop. The Turkish Medical Association has [made clear](#), in an open letter published on Wednesday, that they will resist all attempts to impose government control on their organisation, and will defend the autonomy of the medical profession. This follows the court dismissal of their Central Council on 30 November. The doctors' stance has received widespread support from civil society organisations, who have published their own statement. This [begins](#) "The decision to dismiss the executives of the Turkish Medical Association, the guarantor of the public's right to health, without any legal basis, is a part of the constitutional dismantling process in our country."

In an important successful legal challenge, the Turkish Constitutional Court has [overturned](#) the sentence of imprisonment of journalist Özgür Boğatekin, which had been supported by the Court of Cassation even though the initial ruling had acknowledged that he had carried out no illegal activity. (Another clash between these two higher courts.)

Last Saturday, public sector workers [protested](#) against the government budget that prioritises war over public interest.

Meanwhile, HEDEP is [getting ready](#) to choose candidates for the local elections in March. They have made clear that this time they will stand their own candidates in every region across the country, and that they will use a local primary system, which will not be restricted to party members, to choose who will represent them in the mayoral elections and for 2/3 of council seats.

Since 27 November, political prisoners in Turkish prisons have been [carrying out a rotating hunger strike](#) in support of the international campaign, *Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan: A political solution for the Kurdish Question*. Their decision to do this not only risks their health, but can also result in further punishment and prolonged sentences from the Turkish authorities, but they hope their actions will help to intensify the worldwide campaign.

At this point I have to – sadly – include a correction to the news, widely shared last week, that Japan appeared to have removed the PKK from their terrorism listing. The misleading document at the centre of the excitement – which did not include the PKK in the list of international terrorists but did still mention them when discussing Turkey – has now been deleted from Japan's Public Security Intelligence Agency website. Following Turkish outrage, the Japanese Embassy in Ankara has [issued](#) a statement that "The Government of Japan has included the PKK in the list of organisations subject to asset freezing due to terrorist activities since 2002 and condemns the terrorist acts carried out by the PKK. There is no change in the government's policy on this matter".

"Terrorism" listing is essentially a political act used to justify differential treatment of listed groups and to delegitimize otherwise legal activities. In London, where the Metropolitan Police [tried](#), unsuccessfully, to close down last week's anniversary celebration of the founding of the PKK held at the Kurdish Community Centre in Haringey, the police action has been challenged by the Centre's lawyers, as well as by a public demonstration.

## Turkish attacks in Iraq

In Northern Iraq serious fighting continues between the PKK and Turkish forces. The PKK has [claimed](#) heavy Turkish casualties and loss of Turkish

morale, as well as announcing casualties of their own. There are no independent reports of what happens here, but Turkey has not been able to trumpet the victory that they seek. Instead, they continue to bomb civilian areas, [killing](#) one person and injuring another in the Bamernê neighbourhood of Duhok last week.

## Syria

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria has to contend not only with Turkish attacks that have deliberately destroyed the greater part of its vital infrastructure, but also with ISIS sleeper cells, and with attempts at destabilisation by Assad's Syrian Government and allied pro-Iranian militias. This week, the Syrian Democratic Forces [announced](#) the death of one of their commanders, known as Roni Welat, who they believe was targeted because of his contribution to building good relations between the different peoples of Deir ez-Zor, though the affiliation of the attacker is not known.

## Iran

As wider political events give the Iranian government a new prominence, Iran's internal oppression only hardens. A report published on Wednesday by Amnesty International [records](#) the use of sexual violence by the Iranian establishment to punish protestors during 2022. It concludes, "Iranian intelligence and security forces committed horrific acts of rape, gang rape and other forms of sexual violence... against women, men and children as young as 12... Sexual violence was used by state agents with total impunity as a weapon of torture to crush protesters' spirit, self-esteem and sense of dignity, to deter further protests, and to punish them for challenging the political and security establishment and its entrenched system of gender-based discrimination... Rape and other forms of sexual violence were frequently accompanied by other forms of torture and ill- treatment... and security forces routinely denied survivors medical care, including for rape-related injuries..."

Now, with all eyes on Gaza, the already terrifying rate of state executions seems only to have increased further. At the end of November, Iran Human Rights [reported](#) that at least 176 people had been executed since 7



October. Under Iran's politicised judiciary, their official "crimes" have little connection to reality and only help deflect potential international concern.

Many people will remember the defiant Kurdish language teacher, Zara Mohammadi, who was given a ten-year prison sentence in 2020. Zara has since been released, without explanation, but her husband, Seyvan Ebrahimi, who is also a Kurdish teacher, was [sentenced](#) to eleven years imprisonment last week.

## The United Nations and Climate Change

The biggest failure of international organisation – potentially the most fatal and most ignored – is the failure to come together to make the changes needed to prevent disastrous climate change. The amount of hypocritical hot air being spouted this week in the conference rooms in Dubai for the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP28, could itself be enough to contribute to global warming. Nobody can seriously expect this conference to agree the changes needed to keep our planet viable for human life, but some states are even more obstructive than others. The Turkish delegation ostensibly supports action to prevent climate change, but, along with Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Turkey is a [leading opponent](#) of phasing out fossil fuels. Environmental destruction is also deliberately deployed as a weapon in Turkey's genocidal attacks on the Kurds.

## The European Union Turkey Civic Commission

The question of the power and the limits of international state institutions is implicit in the work of the European Union Turkey Civic Commission, whose 18th annual conference was held at the European Parliament last week with the support of the Left Group, the Greens/European Free Alliance, and the Socialists and Democrats. The Commission is one of the ways that the Kurdish Freedom Movement engages with those state institutions. The Kurds have some good friends among the politicians, and there were strong supportive speeches by members of each of the above parliamentary groups at the conference, as well as speeches by Kurdish academics and politicians. EU politicians do important work in publicising Kurdish issues and providing a counter-narrative to Turkey's story, but they have limited impact on the state



leaders who decide EU policy, over which even the EU Parliament has only limited say.

The only way that the failure of international organisations can possibly be overcome is by growing our campaigns and movements on the ground, and linking them together for mutual support and to increase our understanding.

## Öcalan Book Day

The international campaign, *Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan: A political solution for the Kurdish Question* – which I have already mentioned for the support being given to it by hunger-striking prisoners – is responding to the anniversary of the UN's Declaration of Human Rights with an '*Öcalan Book Day*'. The aim is to strengthen and spread knowledge of Öcalan's ideas, which can make an important contribution to a growing community of resistance movements. Öcalan's writings can help banish illusions in the nation state and liberal "democracy", and inspire the bottom-up self-organisation needed to build a better way of arranging society. There are many events organised across the world – check out @Vigil4Ocalan on Twitter – but even if there is nothing near you, there is a list of suggested readings on the [Öcalan Vigil website](#). I will finish with John Holloway's call at the end of his introduction to the third volume of Öcalan's "Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization": "Abdullah Öcalan is locked up in appalling conditions... We cannot meet to share a chai. What we can do and what I want us to do is to take his ideas seriously, to think about them, to discuss them, to disagree and agree with them, to take them into seminars and universities and assemblies and discussion groups. We are all participants in the same dialogue of 'hope and despair', all joined in determination that we will break the 'civilization', the capitalism that is destroying us."

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