

KNC-NA calls for revoking prison sentences of Kurdish leaders in Turkey

Kurdish National Congress of North America, April 16, 2008: On April 10, 2008, Mrs. Leyla Zana, a former MP for the Turkish government, and a recipient of the Rafto Prize in 1994, and the Sakharov Prize in 1995, was sentenced to two years imprisonment for violating article 7/2 of a 1991 anti-terrorism law which prohibits "those who make propaganda in connection with such (terrorist) organizations."

The "propaganda" of which Mrs. Zana is accused occurred in a speech she gave in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir , during a celebration of the Kurdish New Year holiday of Newroz. In her speech, she referred to "three leaders" of the Kurds including Jalal Talibani and Massoud Barzani of Kurdistan-Iraq and Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey . Her mention of Öcalan is construed as supporting terrorist organizations.

This will be Zana's second imprisonment for speaking out on behalf of Kurdish causes. In 1991, soon after she was elected as an MP to the Turkish Parliament, her parliamentary immunity was stripped away after she recited her oath of office in both the Kurdish and Turkish languages. Under the Turkish Constitution, speaking Kurdish, her native language, in Parliament was taboo. At the time, she was accused of "insulting Turkish honor" and she was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. She spent approximately 10 years of that sentence behind bars prior to her release in 2004.

On April 15, 2008 Turkey also sentenced 53 Kurdish mayors to more than two months imprisonment. The mayors had sent a letter to the Danish Prime Minister Anders Rasmussen in December 2005 and called on Denmark to resist the pressure from Turkey and not close down the Kurdish satellite television station, Roj TV.

We call on Turkey to revoke Mrs. Zana's and the mayors' recent sentencing, and put an end to the socio-political plague that has prevented Turkey from being a democratically functional state by amending its constitution, where the Kurds and Turks can live together in peace. We encourage the Turkish authorities to see that the exclusionary policies of the past are not the path to a bright future. We also urge the U. S. , European and other democratic nations, and non-governmental organizations to urge Turkey to release itself from the cycle of "hate and fear" and find a viable way to resolve the Kurdish "issue" with a political frame of reference.

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Date published: Wednesday, April 16, 2008