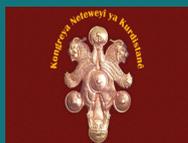




#TurkeyUsesChemicals

Time to Put Turkish Officials on Trial

for Their Crimes in Kurdistan



Kurdistan National Congress (KNK)
Brussels - Belgium



1. Introduction

With this report we want to draw attention to the unlawful methods Turkey is using in its war in Kurdistan. In South Kurdistan and the other parts of Kurdistan, Turkey systematically violates international conventions, such as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (the Chemical Weapons Convention or CWC)¹. Especially during the increase of the Kurdish resistance and international awareness for the Kurdish question in the 1990s, the Turkish military started to use chemical weapons in addition to the dirty war methods it had been using for decades, e.g. extrajudicial killings, torture, burning down of villages and forced depopulation. At that time, several international institutions and the Kurdish public opinion made great efforts and finally succeeded in drawing the international public's attention to this issue. But unfortunately, the way the international community has reacted to Turkey's use of chemical weapons has emboldened Turkey to continue to systematically violate international agreements that ban the use of chemical weapons.

In the past 30 years, dozens of Kurdish freedom fighters and civilians including women and children were killed by chemical weapons used by the Turkish army. The Turkish state even went so far as to try to poison the imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan in 2007². Due to the immediate and strong international reaction Mr. Öcalan received medical treatment shortly after the accusations became public. Despite all these incidents, Turkey has not stopped to use chemical weapons in Kurdistan. It would be impossible to list all the attacks with chemical weapons carried out by the Turkish army in Kurdistan in the course of the last decades. According to international media reports³, several Kurdish fighters were killed when chemical weapons were used against them in 2009, 2013 and 2017. Turkey has increased its use of these internationally banned weapons, especially when it occupied parts of North East Syria (Rojava) which had earlier been liberated from the Islamic State (IS) by the Syrian-Kurdish fighters and the International Coalition. Chemical weapons were deployed by Turkey during the Afrin invasion in 2018⁴ and the occupation of Gire Spi and Serekaniye in October 2019⁵. The Kurd-

1 <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention>

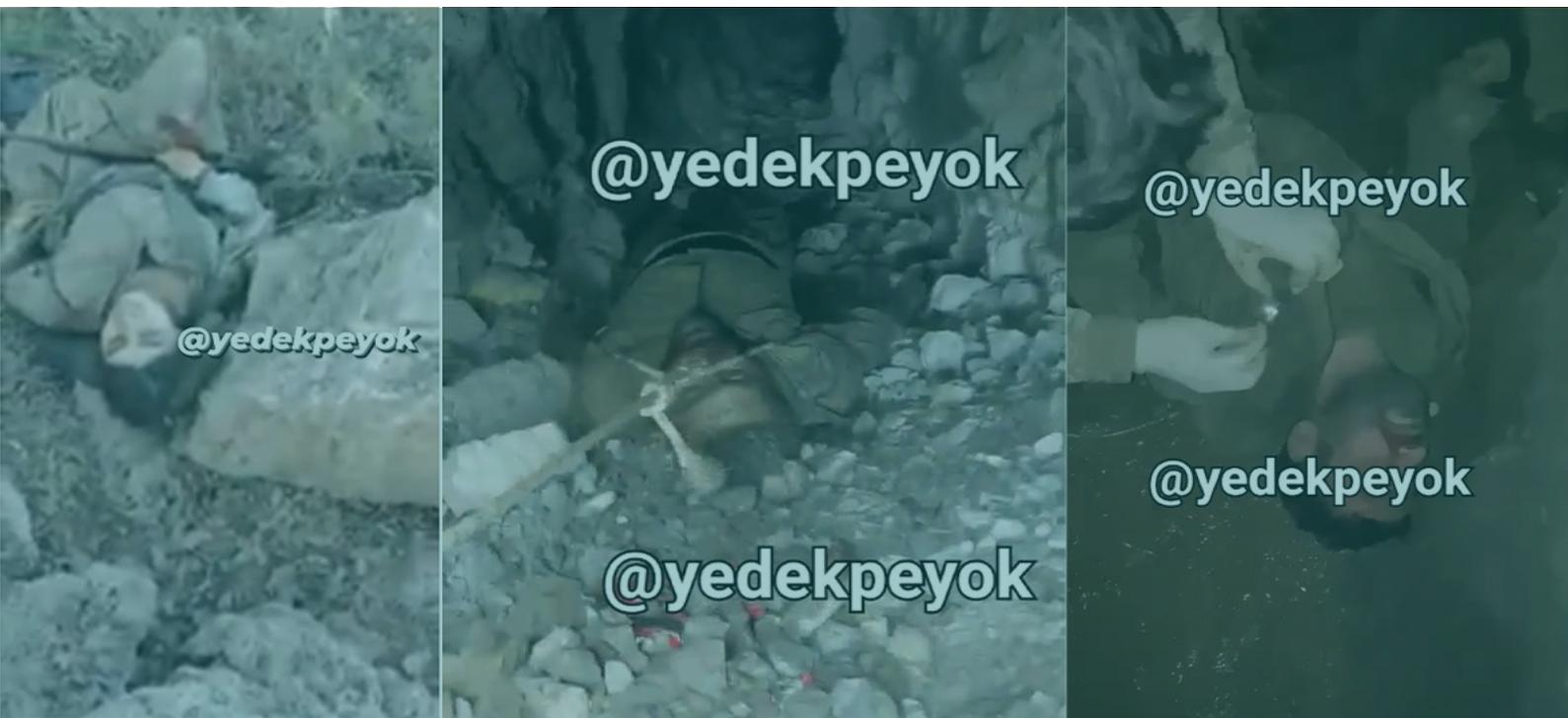
2 <https://www.smh.com.au/world/kurdish-rebel-leader-poisoned-in-jail-lawyers-20070302-8f.html>

3 <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/kaempfe-in-ostanatolien-tuerkei-soll-kurden-mit-chemiewaffen-getoetet-haben-a-711506.html>

4 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/turkey-used-chemical-weapons-in-north-syria-70h6f9rzk>

5 <https://www.newsweek.com/turkey-accused-war-crimes-suspected-white-phosphorous-chemical-weapons-use-against-kurds-syria-1466248>

May 6, 2021: Six members of the HPG guerrilla are killed when the Turkish army attacks their resistance tunnels with chemical weapons





ish boy Mohammed Hamid Mohammed, himself a resident of Serekaniye, became known worldwide after he had suffered severe injuries due to a Turkish air raid with white phosphor bombs on his hometown⁶.

Despite all these verified facts and the ample evidence, the Turkish government led by Erdogan and the country's military have never been condemned for their crimes by international institutions and states. All of them have ignored their own laws and moral duties. This silence and coward permission given to the Erdogan government has paved the way for Turkey's massive use of chemical weapons in South Kurdistan's (Iraqi Kurdistan) regions of Metina, Zap and Avaşîn since April 23, 2021⁷. According to regional news outlets and local sources, the Turkish army has deployed chemical weapons dozens of times during its attacks on South Kurdistan. Several members of the guerrilla and civilians have been killed or injured as a result of these attacks. The Christian Peacemaker Teams-Iraq, an NGO based in South Kurdistan, has confirmed at least one of these instances based on their independent research in the regions directly affected by Turkey's attacks⁸. Based on this report, we intend to highlight the seriousness and urgency of this matter which constitutes a crime against humanity and a war crime and leads to the dramatic damage of the natural environment in South Kurdistan.

In this report, you will find information, pictures and videos provided by local sources that clearly prove the use of chemical weapons by Turkey. The permission to use chemical weapons given to an autocratic leader such as Erdogan entails the danger of even more inhumane and brutal crimes being committed by him in other places in the future. Protecting humanity, internationally recognized values and agreements is the duty of all of us, especially the international institutions and public. Even the smallest steps by these institutions to openly criticize and condemn Erdogan for his use of chemical weapons and to remind him of his international obligations, will directly serve to save human lives and protect international agreements.

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/18/un-investigates-turkey-alleged-use-of-white-phosphorus-in-syria>

7 Video: <https://sterktv1.net/1845-dosya-taybet-werxele-keliyen-sere-tunelan-18-09-2021/> (after 6:30 min)

8 <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/190920213>

Since April 23, 2021: Turkey resorts to the massive use of chemical weapons in its attempt to occupy South Kurdistan





2. Turkish use of Chemical Weapons in South Kurdistan (Zap, Metina and Avaşîn)

Motivated by its neo-Ottoman aspiration to occupy all of South Kurdistan and drive out the local Kurdish population, Turkey has been carrying out ground and air operations for decades. Since April 23, 2021, these operations have seen a dramatic escalation. In addition to the use of thousands of soldiers and a huge arsenal of conventional weapons, the Turkish army resorted to the use of chemical weapons almost immediately after the start of the attacks. This happened after the Turkish army realized that it could not break the huge resistance of the HPG guerrilla. In its monthly balance sheets, the HPG (People's Defense Forces) have confirmed 132 incidents of attacks with chemical weapons on guerrilla forces between April 23 and August 23⁹. Dozens of more attacks have happened ever since. These attacks have directly led to the death of more than a dozen members of the guerrilla¹⁰. The areas most heavily affected by the use of chemical weapons are Girê Sor and Werxelê¹¹ in the Avaşîn region. Here, the guerrilla forces are forced to defend themselves against chemical attacks almost on a daily basis. The civilian population of South Kurdistan has also been directly affected by Turkey's use of chemical weapons. On September 4, the village of Hirore was reportedly attacked with chemical weapons, injuring members of a local family. The Christian Peacemaker Teams-Iraq has stated, that it believes the injuries of the family members result from chemical weapons¹². Although local media outlets have been reporting about these attacks for months and Kurdish institutions have repeatedly called for actions by the international community to stop these crimes committed by Turkey¹³, a deafening international silence has persisted until today. While reports by international journalists are rare, not a single international institution, government or NGO has condemned Turkey for the use of chemical weapons in South Kurdistan. The unwillingness of the international community to address Turkey's relentless use of chemical weapons is being noticed very carefully by the Kurdish public and has led to strong and repeated protests by the Kurdish civil society in Kurdistan, Europe and beyond.

9 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/hpg-publishes-three-month-balance-sheet-of-war-53687/>;

https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/hpg-releases-monthly-balance-85-turkish-soldiers-killed-54396

10 <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/turkish-chemical-weapons-attack-leaked-to-star-amid-calls-for-independent-investigations>; <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/hpg-two-guerrillas-were-martyred-in-turkish-chemical-attack-in-avashin-54734/>; <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/hpg-three-guerrillas-martyred-in-turkish-chemical-attack-in-avashin-54892/>

11 Video:

<https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/footage-shows-use-of-chemical-gas-by-the-turkish-army-in-avasin-54684/>

12 <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/190920213>

13 <https://kck-info.com/statement-sept2021/>

September 4, 2021: A whole family in the South Kurdish village of Hirore suffers from the aftermath of a Turkish attack with chemical weapons





3. Turkish use of Chemical Weapons in North and East Syria (Rojava)

For many, the use of chemical weapons by Turkey does not come as a surprise. Instead, these attacks serve as a reminder of Turkish war crimes committed in the past, the most recent one being Turkey's attacks on the North Syrian cities of Gire Spi and Serekaniye in October 2019. Ever since the establishment of a system of self-administration by the Kurds and the other peoples of North and East Syria, Turkey has been desperately trying to prevent any progress in this regard. Turkey's aggressive attitude towards North and East Syria is motivated by the country's fear that the Kurds of Syria could gain a political status based on their own will. The initial attempts of the Erdogan government to crush the self-administration in neighboring Syria heavily relied on training, equipping and deploying Islamist mercenary forces like Al-Nusra and IS from 2011 to 2016. When these radical Islamists were crushed by the successful resistance of the Kurdish self-defense forces YPG/YPJ, Turkey resorted to sending its own military to occupy huge swaths of land in North Syria, including al-Bab (2016), Afrin (2018) and Gire Spi and Serekaniye (2019). Turkey's deals with the Trump administration and the Russian leadership ensured that it was given a green light by these international powers. The result has been ethnic cleansing, torture, demographic change, rape and a huge environmental destruction in the areas which remain occupied by Turkey until today. Here too, Turkey resorted to the use of chemical weapons to achieve its goals. The use of white phosphor during a Turkish air raid on the city of Serekaniye on October 17, 2019 led to a widespread international outcry¹⁴. Several children were hospitalized with severe burns around their body as a result of these attacks. The SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), the multi-ethnic self-defense force of North and East Syria, reacted promptly by calling for official international investigations¹⁵.

4. Weak International Reactions

Compared to the scale and duration of Turkey's attacks on South Kurdistan, the international community and media outlets have so far shown little to no interest in the grave consequences. Apart from only very careful and few statements by the Iraqi government¹⁶, only a very small number of countries have so far criticized Turkey for occupying territory of one of its neighboring countries or condemned the Erdogan government for its use of brute force to achieve its goal. The Egyptian government and the Arab League are among the few international voices

14 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/turkey-is-suspected-of-using-white-phosphorus-against-kurdish-civilians-in-syria-jp23jmqvv>

15 <https://twitter.com/mustefabali/status/1184605697771757574>

16 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/4/iraqs-foreign-ministry-summons-turkish-envoy-over-violation>

October 17, 2019: Turkey bombs the North Syrian city of Serekaniye with white phosphor wounding many civilians, including Mohammed Hamid Mohammed





that have spoken out against Turkey's aggressions¹⁷. So far, the international media has also largely ignored the dangerous developments in South Kurdistan. Only sporadic and isolated reports on the Turkish occupation and the heavy use of chemical weapons have been published. These include reports by the Jerusalem Post¹⁸, the Morning Star¹⁹ and the German newspaper Junge Welt²⁰. While it cannot be denied that the war in Gaza and the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan deserve international attention, the silence when it comes to Turkey's attacks on South Kurdistan leaves many observers with the impression of deliberate disinterest in the matter. This neglect does not only have serious consequences in the region itself as it encourages Turkey to carry out ever more brutal attacks, but will also lead to serious dangers for the international community in the future. If Turkey succeeds in occupying South Kurdistan and huge parts of Syria, it will feel emboldened to start looking for new opportunities to increase its power in the region and beyond. Turkey's provocative steps in the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and the Caucasus are clear implications for the dangerous path the country will take, if it is not stopped now by the international community.

Especially international institutions, like the UN, EU and Council of Europe, the governments of the USA and UK and international organizations responsible for the prohibiting the use of chemical weapons have not said a single word against Turkey's use of chemical weapons. All the institutions and states, which are quick to use the deployment of chemical weapons by their enemies to justify attacks on them, remain silent if these weapons are used by their allies, in this case Turkey. The U.S., Europe, and the UN have repeatedly called any use of chemical weapons a red line and a highly sensitive issue thus warning numerous forces. But their stance today stands in stark contradiction to their own warnings. They do not warn the Turkish state or actively intervene, but rather play an important role as its political supporters. This shows clearly the hypocrisy of these institutions and states.

17 <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/arab-league-condemns-turkey-and-iran-1.1075393>

18 <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/what-is-turkeys-real-goal-in-northern-iraqs-kurdish-region-analysis-671162>

19 <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/turkish-chemical-weapons-attack-leaked-to-star-amid-calls-for-independent-investigations>

20 <https://www.jungewelt.de/loginFailed.php?ref=/artikel/403459.t%C3%BCrkischer-expansionskrieg-wiedergas-gegen-kurden.html>

February 2021: Gas masks and other equipment used by Turkish soldiers during a comprehensive attack on the South Kurdish region of Gare





5. Our Demands

There is an urgent need for immediate action against the Turkish state in order to prevent it from committing even more crimes against the Kurds. Turkey is using chemical weapons, setting fire to forests and oppressing the Kurdish people and the peoples of Turkey. The EU, the U.S., the OPCW and the UN cannot cover up their current hypocrisy, lack of attitude and lack of morals.

We therefore call on all international institutions, governments and the international public...

...to condemn Turkey for its crimes and use of chemical weapons.

...to put Turkish government and state officials on trial for their crimes against humanity and war crimes.

...to impose sanctions on Turkey for using chemical weapons.

...to impose an arms embargo on Turkey.

We call on the international press to break their silence and start reporting on Turkey's use of chemical weapons.

We call on the international public and all democratic forces to show solidarity with the Kurdish resistance and support the Kurds' demand for an immediate stop of Turkey's attacks and use of chemical weapons.

