

An open letter to the Australian government

Remove the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) from the list of terrorist organisations

We, the undersigned, note that:

1. Ever since the formation of the republic in 1923, Turkey's large Kurdish population has endured heavy national oppression. Even today, for instance, they are denied public education in their mother tongue.
2. The reason for the persistence of the 'Kurdish question' is the refusal of Turkey's rulers to fundamentally budge on this and the rejection by the Kurdish people of second-class citizenship.
3. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) enjoys the support of millions of Kurdish people in Turkey. It is seen as their legitimate representative and their best hope of securing their national rights.
4. The PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire in March 2013 and began withdrawing its armed units to camps in northern Iraq. In a significant concession, it has dropped its call for an independent Kurdish state and instead calls for autonomy within a democratised Turkey.
5. The PKK seeks to enter into direct negotiations with the Turkish government. Its acknowledged leader, Abdullah Öcalan, jailed in Turkey since 1999, will play a key role in any such negotiations and the PKK wants his harsh conditions of imprisonment significantly eased to facilitate this.
6. The PKK has played a key role in the struggle against the inhuman 'Islamic State' gangs in both Iraq and Syria. It has also played a fundamental role in mobilising support within Turkey for Kobanê and Rojava (the Kurdish-majority liberated region in northern Syria). It has close fraternal relations with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the main party in Rojava.
7. Despite this proven anti-terrorist role, the US, European Union and Australian governments continue to proscribe the PKK as a terrorist organisation.
8. Listing an organisation means that it is illegal for Australian citizens to belong to it, raise funds for it or in any way to actively support it. The PKK was first placed on the Australian list of terrorist organisations at the end of 2005 and has remained there ever since. The PKK was re-listed on August 11, 2015.
9. The government's stated case for this listing is extremely weak. It says absolutely nothing about the severe discrimination faced by the Kurdish population of Turkey. It says nothing about the regime's crimes against its Kurdish minority. It tries to criminalise its legitimate right to self-defence against oppression. It says nothing about the government's scrapping of negotiations and return to war against the Kurds.

We therefore argue that:

- Good-faith negotiations between the Turkish government and the PKK are the only realistic way to resolve this long-running conflict. Australia and the West should use all their influence to push for genuine constructive talks.
- The PKK's inclusion on Western terrorist lists is an obstacle to fruitful negotiations. The PKK should be de-listed. In particular, we call on the Australian government to remove the PKK from its list of terrorist organisations.

Add your endorsement to the open letter:

Name* _____
Organisation _____
Profession _____
Email* _____
State* _____ Date* _____

(* = required fields)

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or you can **email** us your details at
AustraliansforKurdistan@gmail.com.



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Selected endorsements

3CR, Community Radio, VIC ● *Australian Kurdish Association*, NSW ● *Wendy Bacon*, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, Professor, NSW ● *Sue Bolton*, Socialist Alliance, City of Moreland councillor, VIC ● *Bob Brown*, Bob Brown Foundation, Former Greens senator, TAS ● *Verity Burgmann*, Monash University, Professor, VIC ● *Phillip Deery*, Victoria University, Professor, VIC ● *Carole Ferrier*, University of Queensland, Professor, QLD ● *Tim Gooden*, Geelong Trades Hall Council, Secretary, VIC ● *Greens NSW*, NSW ● *John Haddad*, Beth-Nahrin Cultural Club, Assyrian activist, VIC ● *Sylvia Hale*, Former Greens state MP, NSW ● *Stephen Jolly*, City of Yarra, Councillor, VIC ● *Damien Kingsbury*, Deakin University, Professor, VIC ● *Kurdish Association of Victoria*, VIC ● *Colin Long*, NTEU (Victorian Division), Secretary, VIC ● *Scott Ludlum*, Australian Greens, Senator, WA ● *Maritime Union of Australia (Sydney Branch)*, NSW ● *Helen Meekosha*, University of NSW, Social scientist, NSW ● *Aran Mylvaganam*, Tamil activist & union organiser, VIC ● *Jamie Parker*, Greens NSW, State MP, NSW ● *Warren Smith*, Maritime Union of Australia, Assistant national secretary, NSW ● *Rob Stary*, Civil liberties lawyer, VIC ● *Sally Thompson*, Adult Learning Centre, CEO, VIC ● *Sam Wainwright*, Socialist Alliance, City of Fremantle councillor, WA ● *Cam Walker*, Friends of the Earth, Environmental activist, VIC ● *Brian Walters QC*, Barrister, VIC ● *Andrew Wilkie*, Federal MP, Independent member for Denison, TAS ● *Arnold Zable*, Writer, VIC