

## Editorial

# Kurdish Voices

On 9 January 2013, Fidan Dogan, Sakine Cansiz and Leyla Saylemez were murdered at the Kurdish Information Centre in Rue La Fayette, close to the Gare du Nord in Paris. These three women were activists in the Kurdish cause. Sakine Cansiz, aged 54, was a founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Fidan Dogan, aged 31, worked at the Centre and also represented the Kurdish National Congress, based in Brussels. Leyla Saylemez, aged 24, also assisted in the work of the Centre. Their assassin, Ömer Güney, used a silencer to suppress the sound of his gunshots. He died in December 2016, shortly before he was due to come to trial, so all the evidence of the Turkish State's involvement in the murders was not presented in Court.

So it was that, five years after the event, Murat Polat, who found the three women, was able to testify in public 'for the first time' about what happened on that night in 2013. He was one of some 30 witnesses at the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Turkey and Kurds, which convened at the Bourse du Travail in Paris on 15-16 March 2018. Antoine Comte, the lawyer who had taken on the case, preceded Mr Polat in giving evidence.

In this issue of *The Spokesman*, we concentrate on events in Turkey itself, in Anatolia in the predominantly Kurdish cities of Cizre and Diyarbakir, in particular in its historic district of Sur. The Tribunal heard testimony about the murder of civilian men, women and children, confined in basements in Cizre to shelter from bombardment by Turkish forces. Some of them were burnt to death: 'chemical or incendiary weapons (flamethrowers) were used', according to Mehmet Tunc, speaking on television from Cizre on 5 February 2016. In Sur in Diyarbakir, buildings in UNESCO World Heritage sites were reduced to rubble as residents were driven away by Turkish authorities. We reproduce in facsimile selected sections of the briefing prepared for the Tribunal, plus the recommendations included in the Tribunal's Judgment presented at the European Parliament in Brussels on 24 May 2018 (see below).

In May 2018, President Erdogan of Turkey came on a state visit to the United Kingdom, meeting Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace and Prime Minister Theresa May in Downing Street. While hands were being shaken in London, Turkey was increasing its grip on Afrin in northern

Syria. Families displaced from Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus, as the Syrian government regained control of that region, now occupy houses vacated by Kurdish families, who fled Afrin city when it came under Turkish attack by land and air earlier this year.

Such is the decline in the UK's international standing that Mrs May is anxious to cultivate relations with President Erdogan, notwithstanding his and Turkey's record of murder at home and abroad, as well as crimes against Kurdish civilians in Anatolia and now in Syria. For Turkey is now a NATO 'uncertainty', in the terms of the latest published US *Nuclear Posture Review*.

The global nuclear era enters a more dangerous phase, as the United States and Russia reveal some of their plans. We reprint relevant extracts from the revised US *Nuclear Posture Review* and from President Putin's speech in March, prior to his re-election. Once again, a race for nuclear advantage is under way, given added impetus by attempts to jettison the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, which outlaws a class of shorter-range nuclear weapons. But this is not a race between equals. The US hasn't neighbours next door who are enrolled in a hostile nuclear-armed alliance. Russia, although extensive in territory and rich in natural resources, has a comparatively small population and a lower level of economic development; hence, Putin's 'Great Breakthrough' proposals for his six-year presidential term, until 2024. Russian historians Roy and Zhores Medvedev offer some cautionary comparisons.

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### **Recommendations**

The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal was called to evaluate the events committed between June 1, 2015 and January 31, 2017 in many South-East Anatolian cities with majority Kurdish inhabitants, as well as other crimes committed in Turkey and abroad, starting in 2003, when Recep Tayypp Erdogan assumed the office of Prime Minister. The Tribunal has not been able to deal with events following and in particular the offensive launched in January 2018 by the Turkish armed forces against the Afrin enclave in Syria and the Kurdish region of Rojava. In view of these further developments and the events which took place during the session held in Paris on 15 and 16 March 2018, the Court made the following recommendations.

1. Turkey must immediately end all military operations carried out by its army in Syria and must withdraw its troops to within its national borders ...
2. Turkey is obliged to investigate and punish the responsible persons for war crimes, ascertained by the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, committed in south eastern Anatolia during the period from 1 June 2015 to 31 January 2017 ...
3. Turkey must restore the rule of law, release still-detained magistrates and journalists, restore the rights of teachers and magistrates (judges and prosecutors) who have resigned from July 2016, restore freedom of press and information, end the state of emergency and fully implement the European Convention on Human Rights ...
4. Prior immediate proclamation of all military activity truce, Turkey must resume negotiations in good faith for a peaceful solution to the conflict — interrupted on October 30, 2014 — and complete them within a reasonable time frame ...
5. At the conclusion of the peace agreement an amnesty must be issued for the crimes committed by all parties during the conflict and all still-detained political prisoners must be released ...

In conclusion, the tragedy that disrupts the South East of Anatolia and is causing incalculable suffering to the Kurdish people is not the result of a destiny that cannot be avoided. It is the product of the errors, burdened by time, of an unthinking dogma of nationalism, which, in the past, provoked the Armenian genocide. The Turkish and Kurdish people can avoid this fate, transforming this policy totally and eliminating its origins. Where today the fatal rituals of hostility and denial are carried out, tomorrow could see a restoration and flourishing of justice, friendship and peace.