

**PEACE IN KURDISTAN**  
**2010 GENERAL ELECTION**

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**Answers provided by: Richard J Deboo, Parliamentary Candidate (Islington South & Finsbury), Animals Count ([www.animalscount.org](http://www.animalscount.org))**

**Questions to our prospective elected representatives**  
*If you want our votes, please listen to our concerns*

The Kurdish community, just like every other community in this country, shares the same concerns about the state of public services; we all want better access to healthcare, affordable housing, improvements in schools for our children, tackling street crime and better job prospects for our young people. However, we are a Diaspora community and as such remain forever deeply concerned about our friends and families back in our homeland of Kurdistan.

We are anxious about the future of Turkey where the government seems determined to defeat and humiliate the Kurds at all costs, using force - from military operations to arbitrary arrests, intimidation and torture - to make us bow to their will, but without making real concessions to enable us to live as equal citizens in a democratic country. Therefore we want to know your opinions on what is happening inside Turkey as much as on domestic policy issues. So please answer our questions; we seek only honest answers.

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1. Abdullah Ocalan, despite spending over ten years in prison in isolation, continues to be seen by a vast proportion of Kurds as their chosen leader. Showing his determination to reach an end to the Kurdish conflict, Mr Ocalan recently prepared a Road Map for peace which he presented to Turkish officials. Some of the details have emerged through his lawyers, but Turkey has so far failed to make the full document public.

**Do you think that Turkey should release the Road Map to the public in order that people can make up their own minds as to the merits of Abdullah Ocalan's peace proposals and thereby allow his ideas to contribute towards peace and reconciliation?**

*Answer:* I strongly support the request of the Kurdish community to see the full public release of the Roadmap so that its merits can be judged and effectively examined not only by all within Turkey but across the international community.

2. In a related matter, British and European Union anti-terrorism legislation lists the PKK – the Kurdistan Workers Party, which since the 1980s has been engaged in an armed struggle against the Turkish state in defence of the rights of the Kurdish people. The PKK are banned as a terrorist organisation, thus banning its activities towards Kurdish self-determination. Despite the ban, the PKK seeks a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and has continued to enjoy mass support both in Turkey and in the Diaspora.

**By banning the PKK, isn't the British government simply criminalising our community?**

*Answer:* I fully support the right to self-determination by all oppressed communities when that self-determination is pursued by peaceful means. Animals Count is a non-violent organisation that seeks social justice for all by peaceful means.

3. And doesn't the ban send a message to Turkey that it can carry on with its repression against Kurds, as any Kurd who speaks out tends to be accused of supporting "a banned organisation" and as a consequence is subject to extraordinarily oppressive measures?

**Do you agree that the UK's decision to ban the PKK contributes to justifying Turkey's human rights abuses against the Kurdish people?**

*Answer:* We recognise the need for the Kurdish community to find a voice within Turkey to express their demands for self-determination, and to call for a proper investigation into any and all human rights abuses. We fully support the establishment of a peaceful organisation to be the voice of the Kurdish people.

4. Don't the actions of the Kurdish people and their political representatives convince you that we are serious about peace?

**What do you think about the successive unilateral ceasefires by the PKK, the recent action of sending peace groups into the country and how these were so enthusiastically welcomed by Kurdish people who spontaneously came onto the streets in their hundreds of thousands?**

*Answer:* History has demonstrated time and again that the pursuit of self-determination by peaceful means is the correct way to bring about change and we would support all groups that use peaceful means to express their demands.

5. Moreover, by the adoption of purely self-defence positions, hasn't the PKK done enough to show that it is the party making the most serious efforts for peace? Meanwhile, Turkey has stepped up its military operations and clamped down on legal Kurdish organisations like the DTP.

Shouldn't the legitimate political forces on both sides be equally encouraged to seek reconciliation by peaceful means and thereby unite Turkish society on the basis of equal rights for every citizen? How can this ever be possible without including the political representatives of the Kurdish population and enabling them to fully participate in this process?

**Do you believe that armed conflicts can only be settled through negotiations for peace not military means? If so, would you support de-listing the PKK in the UK in order to encourage Turkey to recognise the PKK as a party to negotiations for a peaceful resolution?**

*Answer:* it is absolutely correct that the Kurdish population should be entitled to have and should have political representation from within their own community to negotiate on their behalf in all parts of a peace process.

6. Turkey's Constitutional Court took a decision to close the Democratic Society Party (DTP) and ban a number of its democratically elected representatives from political activity; there have since been a wave of arrests of hundreds of DTP members. How do you think Kurdish people feel when the only party that genuinely represents them is dealt with in this unfair way? Isn't Turkey sending entirely the wrong message to Kurdish people; isn't it saying that our grievances cannot ever be resolved by the democratic constitutional route? Isn't this bringing about a lack of faith in the political system among Kurds, especially the youth, and creating a dangerous "powder keg" situation inside the country?

**If you agree that Turkey is acting recklessly, or at least mistakenly, in this regard, how would you seek to influence the country's leaders to change course?**

*Answer:* Turkey's membership of the EU is always going to be predicated on an adherence to basic standards of democratic accountability, political and press freedom and upholding the standards expected of a democratic member of the EU and there legitimate avenues within the jurisdictional powers of the EU to enforce those standards.

7. An opinion delivered by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe in March 2009, concluded that Turkish legislation governing the closure of political parties was not compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

**What would you and your party do to urge the Turkish Government to make the necessary reforms so as to start respecting European standards?**

*Answer:* Leverage would be brought to bear upon the Turkish Government through the appropriate jurisdictional measures available to the EU in respect of satisfying the necessary conditions for membership of the EU and adherence to all appropriate conventions.

8. Under counter-terrorism legislation introduced in 2006, Turkey has been trying juveniles as adults, and jailing them for up to 50 years. Recent official figures have revealed that there are currently 2,622 minors in Turkish prisons. According to the Diyarbakir Human Rights Association, some 737 minors have been charged under the counter-terrorism legislation since its introduction. For example, it recently came to light (see a report in The Guardian, 01/02/2010) that a 15-year-old Kurdish girl, named Berivan, had been jailed for nearly eight years after being convicted of "terrorist" offences. Her "offence" was to get arrested at a demonstration in the south-eastern Kurdish city of Batman in October 2009. She was throwing stones and voicing her support for the Kurdish cause. For this a 13-and-a-half-year sentence was originally imposed on her, later reduced on appeal to seven years and nine months because of her age. She was found guilty of "crimes on behalf of an illegal organisation" and was also convicted of attending "meetings and demonstrations in opposition to the law" and "spreading propaganda for an illegal organisation".

**Is it right that Turkey gets away with TREATING children AS ADULTS ? What is your opinion? IF YOU THINK IT IS WRONG, how will you help stop it? How do you think we feel when our friends and relatives are the victims?**

*Answer:* the United Nations has many appropriate conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and membership of the EU is conditional upon being a signatory to all such conventions. We strongly condemn the unjustifiable and illegitimate sentencing and detention of children as though they were adults and call upon all appropriate organisations to voice their profound disapproval of the actions of the Turkish Government and call upon them to release all children who are currently in detention after being inadmissibly tried as adults.

Many thanks for your time and consideration.

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