

# Cross Party Group on Kurdistan

**Chair- Ross Greer MSP**

**Vice-Chair – Ruth McGuire**

Note of meeting

26 September 2017

Attending: Ross Greer MSP, Ruth McGuire MSP, Stephen Smellie Secretary (Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan), Murat Gullen (Edinburgh Kurdish Community Centre), Goran Abdullah (SSK), Honar Kobani (PYD Scotland), Sarah Glynn (SSK), Paul Holeran (NUJ), Alex Skarlatos-Currie (UEKSA), Conor Hayes and Laura Al (UEKSA)

Apologies: James Dornan MSP, Clare Haughey MSP, John Finnie MSP, John MacDonald (Scottish Global Forum)

Ross Greer in the Chair

1. Welcome: the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies
2. Solidarity with Northern Kurdistan (Turkey)

The Chair welcomed joining the meeting from Ankara via Skype, Mr Hisayar Ozsoy who is a member of the Turkish Parliament as an MP from the Peace and Democracy Party (HDP).

Mr Ozsoy spoke about the recent history in Turkey where in the 2015 June election the HDP gained 13% of the vote, breaking the 10% barrier parties need to attain to have any candidates elected in the national election, and securing 80 Deputies (MPs). From that point on the Government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which had lost its majority in parliament, refused to agree any coalition agreement with the other 3 parties in parliament, instigated a violent and repressive policy against the HDP activists, local offices and party activities, ordered violent attacks against Kurdish towns and neighbourhoods including curfews and mass arrests with hundreds of people being killed, until the November re-run election where the AKP restored its majority. However the HDP still managed to get over the 10% barrier and get 53 Deputies elected.

The situation got worse after the attempted coup which the government blamed on the Gulenist movement. The HDP condemned the attempted coup but were further targeted after it. 100,000s of public sector workers have been sacked, denied social security benefits and had to surrender their passports. Academics have been targeted for allegedly being Gulenist or for supporting the campaign Academics for Peace which criticised the government's violent policies. Journalists who exposed the government's links to ISIS or the extent of the violence have been jailed or sacked or forced into exile as opposition newspapers, radio and television stations have been closed down. Hundreds of NGOs including the Kurdish Women's movement and Human Rights organisations have been closed down.

Mr Ozsoy said he believed that the President Erdogan's AKP government are in a weak position as the only managed to secure 51% in the constitutional referendum through fraudulent means. This means that he does not have majority support for his policies. Mr Ozsoy appealed for international support to challenge the Turkish government's anti-democratic and violent policies.

Mr Ozsoy answered questions from the people present. He particularly appealed for support for the Deputies for Deputies campaign where parliamentarians across Europe 'twinned' with HDP Deputies who had been arrested and face trial for opposing government policy using anti-terrorist legislation.

The meeting thanked Mr Ozsoy for taking the time to speak to the meeting.

The meeting then heard a report from Stephen Smellie on the solidarity actions that trade unions including UNISON, EIS, UCU and NAS/UWT had taken in support of Kurdish people, trade unionists and academics in Turkey.

UNISON Scotland had supported the efforts of Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan to raise money for refugees and to send solidarity to women in prison. They have hosted visits by Kurdish politicians including Figen

Yuksekdag MP, the imprisoned co-chair of the HDP and Leyla Birlik MP, human rights and trade union activists. They had established links with the progressive trade union movements in Turkey, KESK and DISK.

The EIS, UCU and NAS/UWT had participated in solidarity visits to the Turkish teachers union Egitim Sen.

Unite and GMB had visited Turkish trade unions and the south east of the country and reported on the violence and destruction they had witnessed. They have taken the initiative to establish the Freedom for Öcalan Campaign which seeks to highlight the case of the imprisoned Kurdish leader with whom the government had previously been negotiating with to achieve a peace settlement until President Erdogan cancelled any further talks.

Paul Holeran described the support the NUJ had offered to journalists in Turkey who had been targeted by the government. He described a situation where journalists were now 'self-censoring' so that no news was being reported that was critical of the government.

At the end of the discussion it was agreed to promote the Deputies for Deputies campaign and encourage more MSPs to sign up to it.

It was also agreed to support the sister campaign Mayors for Mayors in relation to the sacking and jailing of Kurdish elected mayors who had been replaced by government appointed officials to run municipal administrations.

### 3. Solidarity with Western Kurdistan (Syria)

Stephen Smellie explained the background to the setting up of Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan during the siege by ISIS of Kobane in Western Kurdistan (Rojava) in Syria. SSK had raised money for the refugees and following the relief of Kobane for the re-construction of the city. In particular they had launched, at the suggestion of Fawzo Abdi, one of the leaders of the Kobane Canton, an appeal to raise money to build a school in Kobane. The target was to raise £10,000.

Honar Kobani gave some further details of the situation in Rojava where recently Turkish forces had attacked Kurdish forces and towns. The struggle against ISIS continues and the re-construction of the Kobane and other areas is still a major issue.

### 4. Update on recent Police Scotland searches and breach of Kurdish Community Centre

Murat Gullen reported on the recent raids on 3 Kurdish family houses and the Edinburgh Kurdish Community Centre. These were felt to be an intrusion and intimidation. The excuse had been a complaint from a member of the public about terrorist activities. This was refuted strongly by the families and by the Community Centre. No-one has been arrested and the only thing removed from the houses and centre were a flag of the Kurdish People's Defence Force (YPG) in Syria which is clearly not a terrorist organisation, some other flags and magazines.

Meetings had been held with the local police force and officers had visited the community centre and were welcome to visit again.

The community are considering making a formal complaint to the police and are seeking meetings with Scottish Government Ministers.

It was noted that a number of MSPs, MPs and Councillors had been in contact and offered support.

### 5. Any other business

a) South Kurdistan (Iraq) – the referendum in South Kurdistan the previous day was noted and the anticipated result of an overwhelming vote in favour of independence was also noted.

6. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 24 October

The Chair advised that the next meeting is the AGM of the CPG. He also advised that he had invited a representative of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) to attend to update the group on the outcome and follow up of the referendum.