

# **REPORT OF THE FACT-FINDING MISSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND RECONCILIATION INITIATIVE (IPRI) ON THE PEACE PROCESS RELATING TO THE KURDISH QUESTION IN TURKEY**

## **Executive summary**

The primary motivation for the formation of the International Peace and Reconciliation Initiative (IPRI) has been to advance the peace process in Turkey as a corollary to the scope of a broader peace in the whole of the Middle East. IPRI was launched in December 2012 in response to an international call made by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu for the resumption of talks between the Turkish government and the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, for the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish Question in Turkey.

The call was supported by a number of leading world leaders and Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet, Jimmy Carter (former President of the United States of America), Jose Ramos-Horta (former President of East Timor), Gerry Adams (President of Sinn Fein, Northern Ireland), Kjell Magne Bondevik (former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway and currently Director of the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights), Ingvar Carlsson (former Prime Minister of Sweden), Paavo Lipponen (former Prime Minister of Finland), Anker Jorgensen (former Prime Minister of Denmark) and Kjeld Olesen (former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark).

**The Fact-Finding Mission to Turkey has been undertaken in order to determine the status of the peace process in Turkey. The mandate of the Mission has been to determine:**

- What progress has been made with the peace process which has spanned over a period of time; identify any impediments, if any, which may be obstructing the peace process; what mechanisms have to be put in place to deal with these impediments and how IPRI can facilitate, without dictating to the parties, the peace process in order to reach its logical conclusion.
- What impact these talks will have on the constitutional development for a democratic Turkey based on human dignity, freedom and equality.
- How the solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey will impact on neighbouring countries that are also experiencing conflict situations.
- The strategic objectives, policy and program of action of IPRI in the short, medium and long term.

The objective of the Fact-Finding Mission has been to interview and speak to all role-players in Turkey, including the political parties, representatives of the government, non-governmental organisations (NGO's), the Wise-Men Commission (appointed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to report on the cease-fire), the business community, community based organisations and opinion and policy makers. This report addresses the need to further inform Turkish society and civic organisations of the peace process and the input of the above – together with their views - on such a process.

This report assesses, evaluates and analyses the evidence obtained by the Fact Finding Mission and presents factual findings on the status of the peace process, makes recommendations for removing obstacles, if any, to the peace process, and how to advance and facilitate the peace process for a political solution of the Kurdish question in Turkey. It also assesses how this process will impact on the constitutional development of a democratic Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, based on human dignity, freedom and equality.

IPRI's objective is to work towards World Peace through dialogue and negotiation. It is registered as a Trust in South Africa and as a Non-Profit-Making Organisation and it comprises a Board of Trustees, a Board of Guardians and a Secretariat. The Fact-Finding Mission comprises Judge Essa Moosa from South Africa<sup>1</sup>, Francis Wurtz from France<sup>2</sup> and Osman Kavala from Turkey<sup>3</sup>. It is assisted by Ms Berivan Alatas.<sup>4</sup>

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1 He was appointed in April 1998 by President Nelson Mandela as a judge of the Western Cape High Court. Before that, he practised as a human rights lawyers spanning over a period of more than 30 years. In 1990, he served as Secretary of the Constitutional Committee of the ANC, which gave logistical support to the ANC negotiation team led by Nelson Mandela. He presently serves as the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the International Peace & Reconciliation Initiative (IPRI).

2 He was a member of the European Parliament from 1979-2009 and served on various Parliamentary Assemblies and Committees. He served as the President of the GUE-NGL Group in the European Parliament from 1999-2009. He is a lecturer at the

## **Background to the Kurdish issue and the conflict.**

The 'Kurdish issue' is a complex one, related to the manner in which Kurdish people have been historically marginalised, subjected to intense repression and loss of human and political rights in the face of periods of nationalism, inter-imperialist deliberations, the decline and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Since the early days of the Republic of Turkey, Kurds have been subjected to repression, and resistance to centralised authority has been put down by force.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (the PKK) was founded in 1978. Abdullah Ocalan, its leader, had the objective of liberating and uniting the divided parts of Kurdistan. In 1979, he left Turkey just before the anticipated military coup. The PKK began its armed struggle in 1984. The armed conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK is estimated to have caused the deaths of more than 40,000 people.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PEACE PROCESS**

Since the 1990's, there have been intermittent attempts to find a peaceful resolution to the 'Kurdish issue' in Turkey. Attempts were mostly covert as the Turkish political system during the 1990's and early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was under the control of the armed forces. Civil governments were constrained from having formal talks with the PKK whilst those advocating a peaceful political solution paid with their lives.

When the AKP (Justice and Development Party) took power in 2002, they found that the military was engaging Ocalan on the question of a ceasefire, the laying down of arms by the PKK and a political solution to the conflict. In 2003, the leader of the AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, became Prime Minister. In recent years, Erdogan has used the head of Turkish Secret Services (MIT) to negotiate with Ocalan, rather than the military.

There have been a number of ceasefires before and after the abduction, arrest, trial and imprisonment of Ocalan. The first ceasefire was declared by Ocalan in March 1993. Another was announced in December 1995 and yet another (lasting almost five years) commenced in September 1998. During Ocalan's imprisonment, another ceasefire was declared in April 2005. Lasting until October 2005, it coincided with accession talks between Turkey and the European Union (EU), which the PKK did not oppose. The next ceasefire was announced in October 2006 and ended with cross-border attacks on PKK bases in the latter half of 2007. The most recent ceasefire was announced by Ocalan from prison on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013 as a "historical call".

It had been evident for some time that the Turkish military was unable to defeat the spirit of the Kurdish people striving for meaningful democracy, basic human rights and a measure of political autonomy. Nor could the PKK defeat the Turkish military. Realizing the futility of the armed conflict and the need for a permanent and peaceful resolution to the Kurdish issue, private talks were held between the Turkish government (represented by Hakan Fidan) and Ocalan (as leader of the PKK). Following these discussions, Ocalan prepared a 'Road Map to Peace'. These developments culminated in the Oslo talks between the PKK and the Turkish government in 2011. These talks were terminated, however, by the Turkish government. As a consequence, the armed conflict escalated.

On 28<sup>th</sup> December 2012, Prime Minister Erdogan confirmed the basis of a conflict resolution process and conceded that it was unlikely that the PKK could be defeated militarily even as the PKK could not progress with an armed struggle. Hakan Fidan was given a mandate to revive talks with Ocalan in order to resolve the armed conflict. In January 2013, two prominent Kurdish politicians, Ahmet Turk and Ayla Akat Ata, were given permission to visit Ocalan. A month later, the Ministry of Justice granted special authorization for a Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) delegation to visit him. Since then, BDP delegations (note: BDP deputies have now joined the Peoples Democracy Party - HDP) have been allowed regular visits, but politicians

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Institute of International and Strategic Relations (IRIS) in Paris and is currently Chairperson of the Institute of European Studies at the University of Paris.

3 He is a businessman and was instrumental in establishing a number of business organisations in Turkey. He is active in civil society and serves on the Board of the Open Society Foundation (Acik Toplum Vakfi) and is chair of the Anadolu Kultur, which implements art and culture programs in Turkey in order to promote human rights and a pluralistic understanding of culture. He served on the Boards of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), the Turkish Audiovisual Cinema Foundation (TURSAK) and the Foundation to Fight Soil Erosion (TEMA).

4 Acting as organiser, secretary, researcher and interpreter for the mission.

Ahmet Turk and Selahattin Demirtas have been prevented from further visits.

Following talks, Ocalan on the occasion of Newroz (21<sup>st</sup> March 2013) made an official announcement calling for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of PKK armed combatants from the borders of Turkey. This process of withdrawal remained controversial even as the Turkish government respected the unilateral ceasefire and permitted armed combatants to leave the country unhindered.

## **REFORM PACKAGE**

After Ocalan's Newroz announcement, the Turkish government initiated certain policy reforms relating to Kurdish cultural, linguistic and political rights and the demand for democratization. On 4<sup>th</sup> April 2013, Erdogan established a Wise-Men's Commission, comprised of intellectuals and public figures. It was tasked with publicly explaining the ongoing peace process and reporting upon the public's reaction to the government.

In September 2013, Erdogan announced the reform package that was aimed at kick-starting the Kurdish peace process. Several measures were proposed, including the introduction of education in Kurdish at private schools, the right of villages to use their traditional Kurdish names and the decriminalization of the use of Kurdish letters not found in the Turkish alphabet. Although some of these proposals were implemented, Kurdish representatives were not satisfied with the adequacy of the reform package.

## **NEED FOR A SOLUTION**

In July 2011, the International Delegation of Human Right Lawyers on the Kurdish Question in Turkey recognized the urgent social and economic "need for the resolution of the Kurdish issue in Turkey ... Present circumstances in the Middle-East dictate that the Kurdish issue be resolved without any further delay. The people of Turkey, more particularly both Turks and Kurds, have given the political parties the mandate, through the recent national elections, to resolve the issue politically and not militarily." The delegation urged the "leadership of both the Turks and Kurds" to "seize the opportunity to solve the Kurdish issue for the good of all concerned."

A resumption of the armed conflict in Turkey is likely to not only have serious consequences for Turkey but also the neighboring countries of Iraq and Syria and the wider Middle East. The need for a political solution to the Kurdish issue is therefore urgent and imperative. It was in this context that IPRI decided to establish a Fact-Finding Mission to Turkey. The objective has not been to dictate to the people of Turkey the terms of the political solution but to facilitate the peace process in the interest of all peoples of Turkey.

With the recent local elections in March 2014, the Kurdish BDP party clearly showed that it was supported by the Kurdish people and represented their demands and aspirations, and it was expected to play an essential role in the peace process. The AKP also managed to get an increase in votes and also obtained support from the Kurdish constituency. The Peace Process has provided hope to the people of Turkey for a society where they can live together in peace and equality.

## **THE PROGRAM OF THE FACT-FINDING MISSION**

The preparation of the Fact-Finding Mission was undertaken by representatives of IPRI in South Africa, Europe and Turkey. The visit began in Istanbul on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2014 and ended in Diyarbakir on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The Mission also visited Ankara. Interviews and consultations were undertaken with a wide cross-section of society, politicians, political parties, NGO's and representatives of foreign embassies. The detailed evidence and perspectives gathered from these interviews and consultations in the three cities is presented in the Fact-Finding Mission report.

### **The Fact-Finding Mission met the following people and organizations in Istanbul:**

- Volkan Vural, a member of the Executive Board and Chair of the International Politics and Country Communication Committee of TUSIAD. Ebru Dicle, Deputy Secretary General of TUSIAD, serving on the Information Society, Social Policy and Political Reforms Committee of

TUSIAD was also present. TUSIAD is a Turkish Industry and Business Association.

- Umud Dalgic and Semahat Sevim, Project Coordinators of the Heinrich Boll Stiftung (established in 1994 to work for democracy and human rights).
- Ozge Genc (Director) and Koray Ozdil (Program Officer) of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV).
- Ibrahim Betil, a representative of TOG (the Community Volunteers Foundation).
- Professor Ahmet Insel from the Helsinki Citizens Association.
- Hakan Tahmaz from the Peace Assembly.
- Murat Celikkan, a representative of the Centre for Truth, Justice and Memory.
- Ishak Alaton, Chair of the Open Society Foundation (Turkey).
- Bekir Agirdir, the executive director of KONDA, a research and consultancy agency.
- Members of the Saturday Mothers (who have lost 'disappeared' relatives and are seeking justice as well as truth concerning what happened to their loved ones).
- Aydin Cingi and Erol Kizilelma of the Social Democratic Foundation SODEV.
- Umit Firat, Chair of Helsinki Citizens Assembly.
- Professor Gursoy, the former President of the Medical Association.

### **In Ankara, the Fact-Finding Mission met:**

- Hatem Ete, the Vice-President and Director of Political Research at SETA, which conducts research on the relationship between the military, politics and the Kurdish issue.
- Professor Tekelioglu, Chair of the EU Harmonization Committee in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and an AKP Member of Parliament.
- Professor Yasin Aktay, Vice-Chair of AKP's Foreign Relations.
- Pervin Buldan, Deputy President of the BDP.
- Ambassadorial representatives of Norway, the United Kingdom, USA and the European Commission.
- Dr. M. Sezgin Tanrikulu, Deputy President of the CHP and formerly the chairperson of the Bar Council in Diyarbakir.
- Yusuf Alatas, Vice-President of the International Federation of Human Rights.
- A representative of the Association of Human Rights.
- A representative of the Peace Movement.
- A representative of the Association of Human Rights with Islamic Orientation.
- A representative of Amnesty International.
- Lami Ozgen, the President of the Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions.
- Ms Alatas, speaking in a personal capacity.

### **The Fact-Finding Mission in Diyarbakir spoke to:**

- Several members of the Saturday Mothers.
- Advocate Tahir Elci, Chair of the Diyarbakir Bar Association.
- Sahismail Bedirhanoglu, Chair of Dogunsifed, Eastern and South Eastern Industrialists and Businessmen Association.
- M. Raci Bilici, Chair of the Human Rights Association – Diyarbakir Branch.
- The Democratic Women's Organisation (Diyarbakir Branch), represented by a former BDP Mayor and one of the Co-Vice Chair of the BDP and other members of the organization.
- Seydi Firat and other members of the Democratic Society Congress.
- Zubeida Zumrut, Co-President of the BDP in Diyarbakir.
- The Forum, Kirkklar Meclisi, representing minority communities in Turkey.
- Ms Leyla Zana, an independent Kurdish member of the Turkish parliament and recipient of the Sakharov Peace Prize.

Although the Fact-Finding Mission tried to set up an appointment with the MHP, unfortunately, it could not secure such an appointment. The Mission, during its interviews and consultations, additionally collected a wide range of pertinent surveys as well as documents reflecting the outcome of surveys.

## EVALUATION

The consultations and conversations with the interviewees were remarkably frank and open. All the political parties - other than the MHP – were consulted. As already noted, the Fact-Finding Mission tried to set up an appointment with the MHP but unfortunately could not secure such an appointment. None of the parties (bar the MHP) that the Fact-Finding Mission consulted and interviewed was against the peace process. But from the evidence we obtained, it appears that the MHP was against any talks or negotiations with the PKK or its leaders. Many of the NGO's felt that there are also other issues and concerns in addition to the Kurdish issue that need to be addressed and resolved. These relate to the democratization of the state and society and to the recognition of the identity and rights of other minorities forming part of Turkish society.

The AKP and the BDP/HDP representatives that the Fact-Finding Mission spoke to were very optimistic that the resolution of the Kurdish issue in Turkey would be found. They were confident that the peace process would lead to such a solution. The AKP linked the peace process to a political calendar which, *inter alia*, identified the local government elections of March 2014, the presidential election of August 2014 and the national parliamentary election of June 2015. According to Pervin Buldan, the deputy President of BDP, in June 2014, top government officials briefed senior officials of the HDP/BDP on the peace process. It emerged from the briefing that a new Road Map for Peace will be agreed upon between the government and Ocalan; that the military supports the peace process and Ocalan will be released after the final agreement is reached between the government and Ocalan on the peace process. His release might be preceded by "house arrest".

From the Fact-Finding Mission's consultations and interviews, it emerged that the two main actors in the peace process were Prime Minister Erdogan (leader of the ruling party during the time of the Fact-Finding Mission's visit) and Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the PKK. Ocalan is presently serving a life-long sentence in Imrali Prison. The Mission concluded that they have the necessary authority to steer the process to a satisfactory conclusion. In this regard, it contends that there are two issues facing the peace process: one is a security issue and the other is a political issue. The leadership role of Ocalan is necessary to convince the PKK to abandon the armed struggle whilst Erdogan has the power to bring about the necessary legal reforms to democratize Turkish society and recognize the identity and rights of the Kurdish people.

The criticism leveled against the peace process, particularly by the opposition political parties and the NGOs, is that the peace process is not open and transparent. There is merit in this criticism. Recently, for example, Hakan Fidan, the present head of MIT, held discussions with Ocalan that were based upon the mandate provided by the Prime Minister. It was reported that during these talks, Ocalan prepared a Road Map for negotiations and handed it to the government for consideration. These talks were held in secret and no information was shared with the public. These talks, which culminated in 2011 with talks between MIT and the PKK in Oslo, were inconclusive. But the information concerning these secret talks was only made public after leaks to the press. What was agreed upon at the abortive talks was not publicly revealed.

Indeed, it was only on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2012 that Prime Minister Erdogan took the public into confidence and disclosed, officially for the first time, that talks were held with Ocalan. Although Erdogan kept on describing these talks publicly as technical talks between Ocalan and the security officials in order to terminate terrorism, it was understood that Hakan Fidan had been authorized by Erdogan to negotiate and to reach an understanding with Ocalan. Again, when Ocalan on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013 announced that the struggle should be carried in the social and political arena – and, in accordance with this initiative, the PKK declared a ceasefire and the withdrawal of PKK guerrillas from Turkish territory - although it was not made public by government officials, it was understood that Ocalan was expecting reciprocal steps.

Further criticisms have been made concerning the manner in which the Wise Men's Commissions composed of civilians and a Parliamentary Commission – both put in place as reciprocal steps after Ocalan's 31<sup>st</sup> March declaration – were constituted and functioned. A complaint was that the Wise Men's Commissions were not representative of broad based society but were packed with sympathizers and supporters of the ruling party. The MHP refused to participate in the Parliamentary Commission. The CHP demanded equal representation of the parties in the commission and decided not to participate when this demand was turned down. As a result, the Commission was set up with ten members from the AKP and one member from the BDP/HDP. This raised concerns about the objectivity of the Commission.

There was also a Constitutional Reconciliation Commission which was set up in October 2011 in order to prepare the draft of a new constitution. However, this commission was disbanded in December 2013 as the discussions among the representatives of the political parties did not lead to a consensus for a new constitution. Consequently, its recommendations could not be tabled before parliament. The principle of consensus accordingly neutralized the fact that the Commission was not fairly represented but at the same time compromised those issues on which there was broad consensus. There was furthermore no consensus on certain key articles of the Constitution that had a bearing on the definition of citizenship and issues related to the Kurdish dilemma.

Whilst there was merit in these and other identified issues, according to the assessment of the Fact-Finding Mission, Wise Men Commissions of the various regions have provided fair and balanced reports arising from the terms of their reference. This to some extent has mitigated the fact that they were not fairly representative of broad based society.

A further criticism leveled by the opposition political parties and the NGO's regarding the peace process was that it was not comprehensive and inclusive. Certainly, it is common knowledge that Prime Minister Erdogan played the "the talks about the talks" close to his chest. He did confine such talks between MIT and Ocalan. The Fact-Finding Mission concludes, however, that whilst these types of criticisms have merit, one cannot ignore the political situation prevailing at the time. Four possible reasons are identified by the Mission as to why Erdogan played out this strategy and did not make it comprehensive and inclusive.

The Fact-Finding Mission further notes how the government submitted a new law package to Parliament on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2014 which was approved by a strong majority of AKP, BDP/HDP and CHP deputies. Its objective is to determine the procedure and principles related to the solution process which aims to put an end to "terror" and to strengthen social integration. This legislation in the opinion of the Fact-Finding Mission may have far-reaching consequences for legitimizing the peace process which will lead to the normalization of the political situation in Turkey, reconciliation and reintegration of members of PKK into Turkish society and the release of political prisoners including Ocalan. It arguably addresses the concerns of Erdogan as to why he has played the peace process "close to his chest" and it will also vindicate Ocalan, who on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013 announced three steps for peace, namely, the ceasefire, the legal framework and the normalization of the situation in the country.

The legislation, the Fact-Finding Mission further concludes, may address some of the concerns of the opposition. Whilst the AKP has linked the peace process to its political calendar, in contrast, as the Fact-Finding Mission ascertained in its meeting with Hatem Ete of SETA, he contends that the political calendar stretches from June 2013 to June 2015. Certainly, the AKP in the local government election and Erdogan in the presidential election have maintained their hold on power. The national election in June 2015 will also be critical and will finally determine the outcome of the AKP's peace process in terms of its political calendar.

The CHP, the Fact-Finding Mission concludes, is ambivalent about its support for the peace process. At the outset, it supported the process but insisted that the talks with Ocalan be transparent. It has asked that the discussions be held openly in Parliament with the participation of all parties. This proposal has not been too realistic, however, given the delicate nature of the subject matter and the position of the political parties. The MHP has been against the peace process from the beginning and has described it as an "act of betrayal." The CHP like many of the NGO's has linked the peace process to the democratization of the state and society. But the legislative framework which the Turkish Parliament passed in July 2014 does deal with the reservations expressed by the CHP and some of the NGO's.

In view of the fact that the peace process is being legalized and most of the objections of the CHP and the NGO's are being dealt with, there is no reason why they should not actively support the peace process. Although NGO's on the whole have been in support of the peace process, they have not been optimistic about the final outcome of the process. Their reservations are based on past actions and the conduct of the government – for instance, by the sudden manner in which the Oslo Peace Process was terminated when it had almost reached successful completion. For these reasons, the NGO's remain skeptical about the intentions of the government to see the peace process through to its logical conclusion.

The NGO's that represented the minority groups, the Fact-Finding Mission ascertained, were also in favor of the peace process. However, they expressed strong reservations that such a process is one-sided in that it does not address the concerns of other minority groups. It is therefore paramount that their concerns are addressed at the same time that the concerns of the Kurdish people are addressed. As far as the embassies were concerned, they have expressed mixed reactions to the success of the peace process. They have vacillated between optimism on the one hand and pessimism on the other, yet none of the embassies has expressed any opposition to the peace process. The representative of the European Union is cautiously optimistic.

## **RESULT OF SURVEYS**

The survey findings that were assessed by the Fact-Finding Mission can be summarised as follows: (i) there is no significant sense of enmity between the Kurds and Turks; (ii) they can have a common future in Turkey; (iii) the supporters of the AKP and the BDP are more amenable to social interaction between Turks and Kurds; (iv) resistance to such social interchange came from supporters of MHP and CHP; (v) support for the peace process amongst the Turkish people has exponentially increased from the time the peace talks were announced; (vi) there is large scale support for the peace process – a substantial majority of the Turkish people support the peace process and an overwhelming majority of AKP and BDP/HDP supporters support the peace process; (vii) the public increasingly regards the Kurdish issue as a political problem rather than a security problem; (viii) the majority of society regards the Kurdish issue as the most important political issue to be resolved peacefully and (ix) the divergence in the perception between Turks and Kurds on the question of territorial separation calls for urgent and immediate action on the part of all role-players involved in the peace process.

## **THE FACTUAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the discharge of its mandate, the Fact-Finding Mission concludes that considerable progress has been made in the talks between the government and Ocalan in his capacity as the leader of the PKK. These talks have resulted in the ceasefire which was declared by Ocalan on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013 as well as the withdrawal of the PKK armed combatants from Turkey. The ceasefire and the withdrawal were implemented by the PKK and respected by the Turkish state. At one stage, the complete withdrawal of the armed combatants had stalled because of certain political developments. The Fact-Finding Mission is therefore not in a position to make a finding as to what extent the withdrawal was completed. It recommends that it be addressed during the negotiation process and, if necessary, it can be monitored by independent observers from civil society.

The legal framework gives legal efficacy to the peace process, and sets out the negotiation process and the reconciliation and normalisation of the political situation in the country. By enacting the legal framework, the government has shown its basic commitment to the negotiations and, as such, has kept its part of the understanding with Ocalan, namely, its obligation to put in place the legal framework and normalisation.

It is important that both parties, that is, the AKP and the PKK, as part of the confidence building exercise, temper their language consistent with the peace process in order to avoid confusion in the rank and file of ordinary members of the public but particularly the youth and get them to buy into the peace process. Subject to what the Fact-Finding Mission may state hereafter, in its considered view, the impediment that arose and that can still arise - which can negatively influence the peace process - does not constitute a serious threat to reverse the peace process. The peace process underway presently bodes well for the people of Turkey and, at this stage, there are no impediments blocking the process that are required to be removed and we do not see the need for IPRI to intervene.

### **The Fact-Finding Mission, however, recommends that IPRI:**

- Appeals to the Turkish government to consider releasing Ocalan as soon as is reasonably possible in order for legitimate formal talks to start, and
- Encourages the parties to reach a successful conclusion to the peace process without much delay. They owe it to the peoples of Turkey; they owe it to the peoples of the Middle East; and they owe it to the peoples of the World.

Since the Fact-Finding Mission's visit to Turkey, new developments in Syria and Iraq have threatened and bedevilled the peace process in Turkey. The Islamic State (IS) launched an attack on Mosul in the Kurdish area of Iraq in June 2014. It was earlier involved, as part of the opposition alliance forces in Syria, in trying to dislodge the Assad Regime. It then changed tactics and descended on Iraq to destabilize the Kurdish areas. It has killed and displaced many communities including religious minorities.

With the fall of Mosul, IS has turned its attention on Kobani. Despite being outnumbered and outgunned, the People's Defence Units (YPG) and the Women's Defence Units (YPJ) repulsed the attacks on Kobani. The position of Turkey *vis-à-vis* IS is somewhat ambivalent. There have been conflicting claims whether or not the Turkish government preferred the fall of Kobani. The fallout from Kobani has seen demonstrations in support of the people of Kobani not only in Turkey but worldwide.

However, the HDP (People's Democratic Party) delegation visited Ocalan on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 and released a press statement pertaining to the siege of Kobani and the peace process. Ocalan has emphasized that the Kobani reality and the peace process is indivisible. He has affirmed that the peace process is still on-track and has stated that the priority is to frame, in principle, a Road Map and an Action Plan which will incorporate organs of negotiations, commissions and councils, consistent with the legal framework adopted by the Turkish Parliament ahead of the provincial election. He has stressed that it is of major importance to initiate formal negotiations as a matter of urgency and with due diligence.

The message from the international community is quite loud and clear. The differences between the Turkish and Kurdish peoples must be settled by peaceful political means through dialogue and negotiations. The fact that Kobani has survived IS attacks must send a strong message to the parties that they should expedite the talks and reach a settlement as a matter of urgency. The prospect of IS turning its attention on Turkey and destabilizing it and other parts of the Middle East cannot be excluded.

The Fact-Finding Mission wanted to engage both the then Prime Minister Erdogan and the imprisoned Kurdish leader Ocalan on the peace process but at the time it visited Turkey, it had no feedback from the authorities about any proposed visit to see them. As both leaders are critical to the peace process, it would have been important to have had their input and views on the peace process. The Fact-Finding Mission encourages both leaders to continue with the peace process which they initiated when it was not popular for them to do so.

**The Fact-Finding Mission recommends that IPRI distributes this Report, its findings and recommendations:**

- To both leaders and the organisations they represent for their attention and consideration.
- To all the individuals and organisations the Fact-Finding Mission interviewed and consulted in the preparation of this Report and
- To such other organisations, world leaders and opinion makers that it seems fit.

**The Fact-Finding Mission also recommends that, as the peace process is on-going, IPRI:**

- Urges Erdogan and Ocalan to continue the dialogue for the resolution of the Kurdish issue in Turkey.
- Continues to monitor the peace process and report on the progress of such a process from time to time until the successful conclusion thereof.

The successful conclusion of the peace process can also contribute to the democratisation of the Turkish state and its society. It can have a positive and beneficial effect and impact on the neighbouring countries that are experiencing conflict and strife. The circumstances in the neighbouring countries dictate that Turkey finds a lasting solution to the Kurdish problem in Turkey to enable it to contribute to a peaceful political solution in the strife-torn neighbouring countries. Turkey cannot play a meaningful role in the Middle East whilst the Kurdish issue in Turkey remains unresolved. Let us resolve this issue for the common good of all.