



Members of the European Parliament

To OPCW
Organisation for the Prohibition of
Chemical Weapon
Johan de Wittlaan 32
2517 JR The Hague
The Netherlands

26 April 2023

Object: allegations of the use of chemical weapons by Turkey in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and urgent need for an independent investigation

Dear OPCW

We write as members of the European Parliament who have become very concerned at the credible allegations of the use of chemical weapons by Turkey in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and at the lack of any independent investigation. The Chemical Weapons Convention was an achievement of great importance, especially since, as we read on your website, 98% of the globe – all but four countries – is covered by its protection. However, the Kurdish experience suggests that even within this 98%, coverage is not universal. Protection depends on having a state that will speak up on your behalf. The Kurds, notably, have no state of their own to make such a request.

The need for a request from a state seems to us to undermine the fundamental spirit of the Convention, denying its all-important universality, and restricting its ability to create the chemical weapon-free world that it was established to achieve.

With respect to the particular situation in Northern Iraq, where the Turkish army is fighting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), we note that the Turkish government has even admitted to the military use of tear-gas, which, is, of course, banned by the Convention.¹ There are alarming reports by journalists who have spoken with local civilians who claim to have suffered symptoms associated with chemical attacks after Turkish bombing.² There are videos that appear to show Turkish soldiers putting hoses into the tunnels where the PKK fighters are sheltering,³ and other videos showing the death throes of two of the Kurdish guerrillas.⁴

¹ International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) (October 2022) 'Is Turkey violating the Chemical Weapons Convention?' p 2

https://www.ippnw.de/commonFiles/bilder/Frieden/2022_IPPNW_Report_on_possible_Turkish_CWC_violations_in_Northern_Iraq.pdf

² Karwan Faidhi Dri (19 September 2021) 'Duhok family suffers from ill health after suspected chemical attack' *Rûdaw* <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/190920213>

³ Zeryan Rêvan (16 July 2022) 'Turkish army preparations to use chemical weapons captured on video' *ANF News* <https://anfenglishmobile.com/features/turkish-army-preparations-to-use-chemical-weapons-captured-on-video-61230>

⁴ Amargî Arhat Ba (18 October 2022) 'Images of guerrillas exposed to Turkish chemical weapons' *ANF News* <https://anfenglishmobile.com/features/images-of-guerrillas-exposed-to-turkish-chemical-weapons-63148>



These last videos convinced Prof Şebnem Korur Fincancı, the head of the Turkish Medical Association, of the need for a proper independent investigation; but when she raised this, she was put in prison, only reinforcing fears that Turkey had something to hide. There has also been circumstantial evidence in the form of chemical containers and a gas mask cannister.⁵ Combined, the evidence was sufficient for International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) also to call for an independent investigation.⁶ They tried to carry out an investigative mission themselves, but when they wanted to go to the immediate area and meet with affected civilians, but they were not given permission to go there.

We presume that the evidence we have outlined above is very familiar to you – so you must already be aware of the urgent need for an independent investigation that can insist on going to where it is needed. Of course, we cannot assume the result of such an investigation, but if it does, indeed, show that Turkey has been using chemical weapons, this would be an essential first step in getting rid of them.

As elected European representatives, we consider it a duty to highlight this worrying situation and to do all in our power to ensure that it is properly investigated. Not to act in these circumstances could be tantamount to complicity with a war crime.

Yours sincerely,

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⁵ IPPNW pp 2-3

⁶ IPPNW pp 4-5