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Declaration of the SIMEC Working Group on the Kurdish Question, Paris, 5 March 1999

The arrest of Abdullah Ocalan has again brought the importance of the Kurdish question to international attention. The Socialist International created a Working Group several years ago to contribute to the search for a political solution to this question. It is in this framework that this Group, meeting in Paris on 5 March 1999, affirms the following points:

1 - The conditions in which Abdullah Ocalan was transferred to Kenya, captured and then detained in Turkey still leave many unanswered questions and pose a serious problem in terms of international law. This kind of practice risks putting into question international law, as well as the right of asylum.

Whatever he may be, Abdullah Ocalan has the right to a fair trial, respecting the internationally recognised rules of law. In particular the debates should be public and international observers should be able to guarantee that the rights of the accused are fully respected. The SI reaffirms that Turkey, a member of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE, a signatory of the Declaration of Barcelona and a candidate country to the European Union, is bound to respect these rules. The SI hopes that the international community will impress upon Turkey the importance of this.

The Socialist International proposes to send a delegation to follow the progress of this trial.

2 - The Socialist International has never approved of the aims and methods of the PKK and its leader. They certainly do not justify the methods of repression used by Turkey.

However, the Kurdish question is not limited only to the PKK, nor just to Turkey. It is a great human tragedy of enormous historical complexity, which involves a people numbering approximately 30 million, who live in one geographical zone called Kurdistan, covering parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, and whose fundamental rights are unrecognised. The international community, attentive to the fate of other populations, must not lose interest in these people.

3 - The Socialist International firmly hopes that Turkey will well use the opportunity of recent events in favour of laying down the foundations for a political settlement of the Kurdish question. This is more important than ever as the solution of the Kurdish question in Turkey will facilitate the political and peaceful settlement of the Kurdish question in other countries, and consequently will constitute one of the keys to peace and democratic progress in the region.

The European Union could usefully contribute to this by proposing to open an information office in Diyarbakir.

4 - This is why the promotion of legal and democratic expression of the Kurdish people, an indispensable condition of political dialogue and of the democratisation of Turkish society, has become more urgent than ever. The repression against Hadep, a legal and democratic party which calls for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question, is not acceptable. This party is at risk, a month and a half away from general elections, of being banned. Its leader, Murat Bozlak, is in prison and, since Ocalan's arrest, several thousand party supporters have been arrested. The SI expresses its grave concern about the fate of Hadep and its solidarity to this party.

5 - The Socialist International also expresses its support for the organisations which courageously work in Turkey in favour of democracy and human rights.