

Leyla Zana Sentenced Again!

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(California, December 11, 2008). Using its inherited racist Constitution, Turkey is renewing its prosecution of peaceful prominent Kurdish political figure Leyla Zana. Mrs. Zana once again has been sentenced, this time for 10 years by the Turkish Court for violating the Turkish "Penal code and anti-terror law."

According to the unsubstantiated charges against her, Mrs. Zana had expressed her support for "terror" in the past. Mrs. Zana's struggle for social justice for citizens of Turkey has been recognized in international circles when she was awarded the "European Human Rights Prize Winner." It is hard to see how the Turkish government legitimizes such a harsh sentencing of Mrs. Zana who has been a champion for finding a peaceful solution to the Kurdish plight in Turkey.

Mrs. Zana has campaigned over the years for parity for the Kurds and Turks. This spirit was reflected after she was elected as a member of the Turkish parliament. When she took the oath of office she recited her oath in both Kurdish and Turkish languages. In her inauguration speech she stated, "I am taking this oath for the brotherhood of the Kurdish and Turkish peoples." She made this statement at a time when speaking Kurdish was taboo in any formal gathering in Turkey, particularly in the parliament. Therefore it is illogical for Turkey to accuse her of supporting terror, when more than 27 years ago she embraced the Turkish-Kurdish "brotherhood" and has never changed course since.

Ironically, such a court ruling has been carried out by a nation that wants to become a member of the European Union, a union which requires that civil liberties be extended to citizens living within its member nations. Sentencing a prominent citizen for exercising her human rights prerogative is another reminder to the world that Turkey is in dire need of fundamental reforms in its human rights, political, and judicial principles. This latest round of the Turkish cynical maneuver can only be construed as another "dirty trick" to thwart Mrs. Zana's effort to run for the office of Mayor in her city.

Instead of sentencing Leyla, who has become the true symbol of love, loyalty, and peaceful resistance, Turkey should amend its racially prejudiced Constitution and end the cycle of fear and hate, which has stemmed from the radical chauvinist mentality - a mentality which has brought nothing to Turkey but imprisonment in its excruciating phobia and cynicism.

For Turkey to distance itself from its xenophobic past is to find a way out of the plague of "Turkish nationalism." To do this, Turkey must start treating the Kurds and other ethnic

groups as equal to Turks, so together they can live in peace and foresee a tranquil future. Only then can Turkey find serenity at home and a decent place among the family of nations.

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