

A G A I N S T the D A Y

Kurdish Politics

Mashuq Kurt and Nilay Özok-Gündoğan, Editors

Selahattin Demirtaş

“I Am Kurdish, My Homeland Is Kurdistan”: Excerpts from Selahattin Demirtaş’s Testimony before the Turkish Court

Editors’ Note: Selahattin Demirtaş stands as a prominent figure in Kurdish political leadership, renowned not only for his tenure as a parliamentarian and presidential candidate but also for his pivotal role as the head of the left-wing pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey. During the 2010s, Demirtaş steered his party through the turbulent waters of peace negotiations between the Turkish state and the Kurdish political movement, notably the PKK. The June 2015 general elections marked a significant milestone for Demirtaş and his party, as the HDP secured 80 seats out of 550 in the Turkish parliament, effectively thwarting the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) bid for a governing majority in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. However, this triumph was soon eclipsed by heightened hostility toward the Kurdish political movement, particularly in northern Syria (Rojava). In response, the AKP government abruptly terminated peace negotiations, opting instead to vilify HDP politicians to sway Turkish nationalist sentiments in the subsequent snap elections of November 2015. The ensuing political turmoil witnessed a harrowing escalation of conflict between the PKK’s urban youth wing, YDG-H, and Turkish security forces during 2015 and 2016. Tragically, the disproportionate response of the Turkish security forces resulted in over three thousand casualties and displaced approximately half a million individuals, either temporarily or permanently. Following the tumultuous coup attempt in July 2016, the Turkish government intensified its crackdown on the Kurdish political movement, targeting politicians, activists, and supporters alike. Demirtaş, hailed as a symbol of Kurdish resistance, was arrested in November 2016 and has since been a political hostage in Edirne Prison, a stark separation from his native homeland in Turkey. His detention stems from fabricated charges, allegedly originating from his speeches, political statements, and purported involvement in the Kurdish riots of October 2014, known as the Kobani Protests, across northern Kurdistan. The following

excerpts are derived from Demirtaş's extensive testimony before the Turkish court, spanning nine days between December 2023 and January 2024.¹ We express our profound gratitude to him and his legal representatives for facilitating the compilation of these statements and the subsequent exchange of edited copies, which are instrumental in finalizing this testimony for scholarly dissemination within this special issue.

Although I have been imprisoned for seven years, this is the first time I am defending myself. For the first time, I have the opportunity to respond to the accusations. Because all the conversations to date have been either a review of detention or discussions about procedure. Let me make it clear from the beginning: I am not addressing my defense to your authority; I am not speaking to the court. I am presenting my testimony to the public. I do not know how many days it will take to answer for a conspiracy you have been plotting for nine years. Until today, we have not even had the opportunity to use or submit our documents to the court. Therefore, I will start today and make an effort to respond to all accusations without interruption, as long as your court does not cut or restrict my right to defense.

Everyone should know that the total accusations against me are the speeches I made. The rally speeches I gave eight, ten, fifteen years ago. There is not a single concrete piece of evidence in the file other than press statements. I am not accused of any illegal activity or undercover work. This applies to all our friends; I speak singularly because I make my own defense. This is a case of political revenge. We are not legally imprisoned here.² We worked to live together. We worked for peace. We tried to silence the guns. We tried to prevent further bloodshed in this country. And we've been here in prison for this reason for seven years. We called for peace. We paid the price for this, and we still call for peace.

Now, you have reached the decision stage of the case and this conspiratorial game. I know you are impatient in explaining the decision that was dictated to you. However, regardless of the decision you will disclose, it is null and void in our conscience, in the conscience of our people and history. In this war of wills, you could not make us submit; you could not bring us to our knees or subjugate us. While you are left with your hearts darkened by evil, we, as the soldiers of the honorable struggle of our people, are written and being written on the pages of history. I will not give you the opportunity to read your decision to my face. You will read the decision to yourselves. But to my wife, my daughters, my family, and all our people, this is my will and singular request: when the decision is announced, you should play drums and zurna in the garden of our house in Amed and welcome the decision

enthusiastically with dancing *govend* and ululations because we will welcome it with the same enthusiasm and morale in our cells.

The political struggle waged by our friends outside of here is, first and foremost, a struggle for an honorable life. We would rather die than compromise and live dishonorably. Despite all our shortcomings, we tried to continue this difficult struggle with determination. Of course, we had our faults, mistakes, and deficiencies during this period. Despite using all our power and good intentions, we have not yet achieved the political success we long for. On my behalf, I apologize to all our people for this. I apologize to all our friends, all my friends in prison and exile, who pinned their hopes on us, on our party, and were driven to pessimism.

The only people who can stop this course are the poor people who pay the heaviest price for this war. It will be much more possible to live together as brothers if the Turkish and Kurdish people join hands for peace, equality, and freedom. If they raise their voices against war, they can sit down and solve the problems by talking. It will be much easier to maintain peace and grow democracy. We are politicians who want peace, believe in a democratic solution, and work for it. Even though we have been kept in prison for years without guilt, we still cry for peace from the inside.

“I Am Kurdish, My Homeland Is Kurdistan”

In this courtroom, they want to judge and convict the reality of Kurds and Kurdistan through this lawsuit against us. Beyond that, the tacit political goals are to win the referendum elections, keep us in prison to legitimize the one-man regime, and instill fear in society. I must state at the very beginning of my defense against these political goals that I am Kurdish, and my homeland is Kurdistan. Both my identities are my honor. No one can make a judgment on our values.

Kurds are not Turks. It is impossible for them to be. Calling a Kurd Turkish or trying to Turkify him is the Kurdish question. Because the Kurdish people are an ancient people whose history dates back to Mesopotamia thousands of years ago, that is, Kurdistan’s geography today. Their languages are from different language groups. Kurdish is from the Indo-European language group, and Turkish is from the Ural-Altaic language group. This alone defines two different peoples, two different ancestors. If you say that there is no such language as Kurdish, we are all Turks, and everyone’s mother tongue is Turkish, then yes, you have a Kurdish question. I don’t, but you do.

In this geography, the Kurdish question started after 1071, following the cooperation of Alp Arslan and the Kurds. For a thousand years, we have only been cheated. We have been deceived, and this is called the Kurdish question. Every time the Kurds extended their hands to the Turks, they were accused of treason. The Kurds never shot the Turks in the back, neither in the Ottoman nor the Seljuk period. They did not betray the Arabs in the Abbasid period, nor the Persians in Iran, or the Turks in the Republic of Turkey. But each time, it was the Kurds who were betrayed. This is called the Kurdish question. It has been going on for a thousand years, in my opinion, because the Kurds have not been able to gain the right to govern themselves in their homeland. Their autonomy was recognized but corrupted; the federative system was recognized and corrupted.

The Ottomans, the Persians, the Arabs, the Byzantines at the time, everyone knew the Kurds as the mountain people, the ancient people of the Zagros region. They conceived of them as the gendarmerie of the border regions; that the Kurds should provide security and protect the borders and remain there as a measure to prevent the enemy from coming from the other side. They struck from time to time, and this side struck every now and then, but in the end, the Kurds were always crushed like cartilage. We are Kurds. We know Kurdistan is our homeland. None of those who cite the geography of Kurdistan in Turkey today do so to divide Turkey or establish an independent state of Kurdistan. Why are you so uncomfortable with the name of my homeland? You feel pride when it comes to the Turkish homeland, the red apple, and the homeland of Turks in all geographies, including all of Central Asia. Well, we also have a homeland called Kurdistan.

Currently, the Kurdistan region of the country is the region of exile. For example, do those who threaten each other on the street, those who threaten an officer, do they ever make such a threat and say I will banish you to Antalya? No, they say they will banish you to Çukurca; they will banish you to Hakkari or Şırnak. They have been saying this for a hundred years and keep repeating it. Have you ever heard of someone who said I will send you to Bodrum, Marmaris, Kemer, Datça, or I will send you to Istanbul or Ankara? But Kurdistan is a place of exile. It is the other, and they know this. They know those places are Kurdish, yet they won't accept it when it comes to it. Turkish society and Turkish intellectuals are so distant from the Kurdish reality. It is the greatest tragedy of the Turkish intellectuals that they do not know the people of their own country. Those who judge us do not know either. I am not specifically talking about you, but those who judge the Kurds in Turkey usually do not know.

Therefore, we want to explain how we came to the present by flowing from two different rivers and sociologies and why you do not have the right to judge us. I am not saying this in terms of technical law or history. Today, all over Turkey, the hearts of the Kurds are in favor of living in peace and brotherhood. But Kurdistan is the motherland of the Kurds; it cannot be taken out of their own hearts. They cannot rip out the motherland. This is not a job that a judiciary, a punishment, or a law can do. This is the truth. What we call Kurdistan does not just consist of Hakkari and Şırnak. It is everywhere. It is in Qamishli, it is in Mahabad. This is our homeland. It does not disappear when you deny it or don't believe it exists.

Even when someone tries to destroy this place, it remains. Denying the reality of the Kurds and Kurdistan is the denial of a people. To deny the language and homeland of any human being is to deny their humanity; it is an attack on human dignity. The Kurdish people have a history as a Kurdish nation of their own. Denial of this is a denial of human dignity. If we accept this, we feel ignoble. As Kurds, we cannot look each other in the eyes. I can't look you in the eyes either. You know very well that someone who has denied this is a liar, a hypocrite; you should know. Such Kurds are worthless in the eyes of the state anyway. They use them up and throw them away. We are ashamed of ourselves if we meet someone else, someone who denies their identity anywhere in the world. We see them as demeaned, humiliated characters. So, if a black person is ashamed of their blackness, if they are ashamed of their identity, if they try to be white, we feel upset, we are ashamed, right? But a Turk imposes this on a Kurd. If we are forced to say that we are Turks and our homeland is Turkestan, what will be achieved from the human typology that emerges? So, you need slaves, not citizens, because only slaves emerge from this. On the occasion of this case, we say "No, we are free people" to those who want to enslave us. We have a homeland and a national anthem.

So, how will we live together? The formula proposed to us by the Constitution is as follows: It is said that everyone who is a citizen of the Republic of Turkey is Turkish. According to Articles 82 and 66, education cannot be provided in a mother tongue other than Turkish; therefore, the only mother tongue is Turkish, and no other language is a mother tongue.

A Kurd can say, "Yes, I am Turkish." It isn't a problem being Turkish because it's not about race, blood, or brains. It's about culture. A Circassian can say, "I am Turkish." We can't blame him or call him a renegade or anything else. An Armenian can say it; anyone can say it. There's no problem there. There's no problem for me personally. How can I blame him? If he calls himself Turkish, he is Turkish from my point of view. The problem is

the failure of the state regarding those who say they are not Turkish. What happens when I say I am Kurdish? Where exactly will the state place me? Where will it situate me, and in what legal arrangement? What about my rights? That's the problem.

The state is now putting us in the brackets of separatism, terrorism, murder, execution, torture, arrest, and exile. For almost two hundred years, the Kurds have been objecting to this, rebelling with writing and poetry, with politics, with weapons. Every method they use is considered terrorism. For God's sake, do we even have one blade of grass left in Turkey on this side? How can we accept this distortion of history? The largest part of Kurdistan remained here. What are we going to do? What will happen to those who advocate this, who say, "Well, I am Kurdish, I am Alevi, I am socialist, I am Circassian, Bosnian, Pomak, I too have a native language; but I also want to live together in this country, brother. I don't want to separate." Well democratic autonomy is a solution proposed for this.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy proposes a scientific method that prompts students to ask questions or question predominant beliefs and practices. Paulo Freire is an educator who has tried critical pedagogy and succeeded in many places, including America and his own country, Brazil. Education either integrates the younger generations with the logic of the current system and creates a behavior of acquiescence, or it becomes a practice of freedom. Here the aim is to discover how we can contribute to changing the world we live in and be able to do this creatively and critically.

Freire was aware that the ruling elites, religious fanatics, and right-wingers found critical education too dangerous. Because the aim of this education was to raise students as critical agents who ask questions effectively and interrogate common ideas. Freire insisted that education was, in any case, the most important form of political intervention. Some right-wingers told him, "With your so-called critical pedagogy, you want to brainwash young people and make them think like you." "No," Freire said, "the goal is not to raise a generation of out-of-turn leftists, but rather help young people develop critical thinking skills and encourage people to think, to make decisions for themselves." Well, what makes conservatives assume that all young people will embrace leftist ideas if they are set free? They don't seem to have much faith in the validity of their worldview. Perhaps they know in their hearts that their ideology cannot win in a fair race.

Moreover, Freire says that in a socialist society, there must be critical pedagogy. Leaders who insist on imposing their own opinions, whether right-wing or left-wing, do not rule the people; they manipulate them. Such leaders do not liberate; they only oppress. A true emancipatory pedagogy cannot put walls between the oppressed people. Or treat them like unfortunates who need to be guided. In the struggle for emancipation, every oppressed individual has to be an example for himself. What we need is an uninterrupted revolution in thought. In other words, a continuous awareness of the sources of exploitation and oppression, no matter what packaging it presents itself in.

All this can only be achieved with a critical pedagogical education model in one's native language. Therefore, liberatory, critical, scientific, and free education is essential for the permanent solution of all problems, including the Kurdish question, the democratic deficit, discrimination and violence against women, ecological problems, conflict, and violence. Free thinking and the ability to think freely are essential in terms of solving all the problems of society, including the problems we experience. For this reason, in the solution to the Kurdish question, it is very important to have free thought, to be able to think freely and to be a free person. This is an essential issue not only for the Kurdish question but also for all the essential problems in the world. No national problem can be solved with the current education model, nor can a fundamental problem like the Kurdish question be solved.

“The Official Thesis of Turkishness Is Based on the Denial of Kurdishness”

The official ideology of the Republic of Turkey and the official thesis of the Turkish nation is based on the denial of Kurdishness, not on the denial of the Americans, the Germans, the Israelis, the Emiratis, or the Saudis. Because it means that if there are Kurds, there is no Turkish nation in today's official discourse. Because there is no place for Kurds in the Turkish nation. As soon as you say there are Kurds, what becomes of the Turkish nation? What will happen to the thesis that everyone [in Turkey] is Turkish, and what will happen to that article of the constitution? Therefore, when it comes to the Kurds, when it's about the Kurds, the existence of the Turkish state and the survival of the Turkish nation come into question. This is the problem. Because of this, the Kurds have been prosecuted throughout history to uphold the indivisible integrity of the Turkish nation. The problem is not the existence of the Kurds but the fallacy of this Turkishness thesis. The problem is not that a Kurd says he is a Kurd; the problem is in the laws; it is in this mentality. These need to be corrected. Let the state of the Republic of Turkey come out

and announce this. Because you say that we have been brothers for a thousand years with the Kurdish people, you say we are members of the same religion; you say we are turning to the same qibla and praying together. You are meeting with the imperialists with no reservation, so why is meeting your brother of a thousand years, shaking hands, or even suggesting this considered terrorist propaganda? That's an insult to us. The representatives of the Kurds are either in prison, in isolation in İmralı [Prison], in exile, or on the list of those who have been declared terrorists.

If the Kurds were racist, there would be a civil war in Turkey in a fortnight. Fortunately, none of us have been involved in racism; none of our parties has ever come out and formed a sentence that would insult the Turks or another ethnic identity. You won't hear it from any Kurds; it's not just our party. Because they are an oppressed people, they just want their own identity. The Kurds have no fascists; there aren't any racists [among Kurds]. This is why we are forced to explain our problems to the other side, who are in a state of madness. It is not easy to explain it to someone whose ideas have been hardened for fifty or sixty years by racist propaganda and education. You have to explain it not once but a thousand times. You have no other choice.

Trauma Must Be Healed to Eliminate Violence

Michel Foucault reverses the famous statement of Prussian General Carl Von Clausewitz that war is the continuation of politics by other means. He says that politics is the continuation of war by other means. And Foucault continues that war is a permanent feature of politics in any situation. So there is always war at the heart of politics. The idea of the legitimacy of political sovereignty is a deception used to hide the war within politics. It is especially used to hide the war between those who are privileged and those who are not. Foucault asks the important question: what happens at the level of power and violence when life becomes the main target of political strategies? Again, he answers, wars are no longer fought in the name of a sovereign or power that needs to be defended at some point; wars are now fought in the name of the existence of everyone. Society as a whole is directed to massacre in the name of a vital necessity. The most critical point to highlight here is that people can attempt to kill others in order to continue living. This happens thanks to the state strategy, which sees the enemy as a kind of biohazard. By killing, Foucault doesn't just mean taking someone's life; he is also referring to possibilities such as pushing someone to death, increasing the risk of someone's death, political death, exclusion, or rejection.

On the other hand, Frantz Fanon makes the following arguments in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, in which he collects his observations and insights about the local situation in colonial societies. Colonialism not only subjugates a people and empties all the forms and contents of the Indigenous brain, but it also targets the past of the oppressed through a kind of perverse logic, falsifying, distorting, and eventually destroying this past. This creates a violent conflict between the colonized and the colonizer. The process teaches the oppressed that violence is necessary to eliminate colonial oppression. Fanon goes on to say that violence at the individual level is a cleansing force. It eliminates the inferiority complex or passive attitude of the colonized, strengthening the oppressed and restoring their self-confidence. Being part of a life-changing and robust force gives the individual the feeling not only that he is the master of his own destiny but also that his contribution to the movement is strong enough for his comrades to determine their own destiny as well. That is, devoting your life to a purpose. The person who understands the source of his disease and cuts off the root of this disease in society is now healed and will enjoy the action in a healthy way.

Now, starting from Foucault and Fanon, let's return to our own situation, Kurdish-Turkish relations. The political institution, which has now undergone metamorphosis in capitalist modernity, carries a hidden violence. In all modern societies, politics is dominated from the top down to the bottom. The top is superior because of its hierarchical structure. It is the one that commands, directs, and controls. Although it seems to be doing this consensually, there is blackmail, which is actually a threat in its imperative. If you don't support my undertaking, bad things will happen to you. Like you'll be crushed if you don't follow my command. That's how society is repressed and how it casts its votes. In this respect, there is violence that is carefully disguised, even in the most democratic form of politics. This violence is directed at the society, the individual, as well as other political actors, parties, and NGOs [nongovernmental organizations]. Therefore, as societies under the tyranny of politics experience uninterrupted or repetitive trauma, they are intrinsically uneasy, insecure, aggressive, or anxious.

Based on this determination, I would like to say the following: the first step that needs to be taken for politics or politicians to distance themselves from violence is the democratization of politics. In other words, it is the application of direct democracy in which the individual becomes the agent of politics in all areas of life. Now, Fanon's findings were presented in [Jean-Paul] Sartre's preface as if they were a suggestion, which has been much discussed and remains controversial. Fanon makes a determination here; he does not promote it. In other words, he determines that the oppressed feel liberated

from this trauma when he responds with violence to the violence he is exposed to. Now, this is an important finding for Kurdish-Turkish relations. In other words, what is the trauma that leads to violence? What is the trauma that urges us to violence? We have been trying to explain this for days and weeks. The way to eliminate violence is primarily the treatment of this trauma. Because it turns into a mutual trauma. The spiral of ongoing violence becomes a shared trauma. Until that trauma is eliminated, the politician who just condemns the violence and does not do anything to change it is a hypocrite.

Democratic Autonomy

Let's start with what democratic autonomy means to us. It envisions a radical reform to ensure democratization in its political and administrative structure. It acts from the philosophy of empowering local administrations and giving the public a say and a choice in developing problem-solving methods. It advocates democratic participation in order to involve the people in the decision-making processes and takes decisions from all local units of the parliamentary system.

For example, one of the headings in a position document published by the Democratic Society Party (DTP) in 2010 was democratic autonomy. All of our parties that have been changed or closed down had this proposal on their agendas, and none of them had any reason or justification for being closed down. We define it as democratic autonomy, meaning democratic self-government for the resolution of the Kurdish question. After the DTP, we founded the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) because our party had been shut down. However, I emphasize that democratic autonomy is not one of the reasons for its closing. The BDP program was submitted to the Prosecutor's Office of the Court of Cassation and was accepted; the Constitutional Court did not justify the closure on this ground. What does this say about our party's program? Again, I come to the relevant heading because there are details about our party's program and proposals for solutions in each. However, in this sense, with the fundamental paradigm that accepts local governments as the cradle of democracy, democratic autonomy is based on the specific demands and needs of the local society. This will be developed through decentralization, which is predicated on ecological balance, on the basis of the participation of political administration. The principle of social justice will be the foundation for realizing these aims. Kurdish will be used as the language of education and training. The main force of democratization is women. We included this in the People's Democratic Party (HDP) election declaration on June 7 and November 1, 2015. We explained what we meant by democratic autonomy to the voters.

“Defending Autonomy Is Not Separatism”

Nowhere have we imposed this on anyone by force. We tried to explain it in parliament, and we explained it to our constituents and asked for their votes. If we had gotten enough votes, had come to government, and had the power to change the constitution, we would propose it to the parliament. We would take it to a referendum. We don’t have that power either. We have to do it with politics, we try to explain. As Kurds, we propose to the state of the Republic of Turkey that we end our one-hundred-year tragedy like this. AK Party, MHP, İyi Party, CHP, whoever you are, come and let’s discuss it. This is what we consider negotiation on the Kurdish issue. Let’s discuss it in parliament. Of course, there is an armed dimension; that’s why İmralı should be part of the conversation, and Abdullah Öcalan should be involved. That’s why we say this: make peace with whoever you are fighting. If you have an interlocutor in war, they are also your interlocutor in peace, as sure as two and two is four. We did not make this rule; this is how it has been throughout history. You will negotiate with whomever you are fighting. Therefore, this is a political demand from our point of view; it is a project of political resolution. These cannot be called terrorist or criminal activity.

Now, would autonomy be achieved with trenches and barricades? No way, it’s indefensible. Democratic autonomy can be secured by consensus, by persuasion, and it can be made by constitutional amendment in the parliament. Democratic autonomy can be built on consent, not with guns, not with trenches and barricades. I have been advocating for this since those early days. I will read the speeches I made. I still argue: if you want independence, you can do it, I mean theoretically, but democratic autonomy cannot be based on force of arms; it can be based only on consent, it can be based only on persuasion. Because living together is not something that can be done by force.

The political movement that we represent and in which I am involved argued that the governance model throughout Turkey should change. It advocated for restructuring the governance model in all of Turkey in a locally strengthened way, rather than a Kurdish-specific, territorial, ethnic, or regionally bound state or autonomy system; rather than a regional administration. In other words, if decentralization models are strengthened throughout Turkey, the Kurdish right to self-government and self-determination will be met within the borders of the Republic of Turkey without becoming separated and fragmented. What was the reason for this? Why should it be all over Turkey? First of all, people from different identities live all over Turkey. Kurds also live there. Second, autonomy and federal structures specific to

only one region can lead to very different conflicts, tensions, or imbalances between the rest of Turkey and the region in question. So, no matter what model you prefer, whether it is a federal, state, autonomous, or strong municipal decentralization model, if democracy does not develop as a whole within the borders of that geography, that country, that state, the federalism of a region cannot provide the conditions for those people to govern themselves freely. All local administrations can be subject to the supervision of a central constitution. As the transfer of authority to local governments increases, the state becomes democratized, which is the case in Europe and worldwide. Turkey is one of the very exceptional countries where autonomy is not applied; even in unitary state structures, most powers have now been transferred to the local level. It is the same in Africa, Asia, and all of Europe; it is the same in most of the Americas, Canada, and Australia. Turkey is now one of the outstanding countries that have not implemented decentralization.

Seven Suggestions for the Solution of the Kurdish Question

Yes, now, if you will excuse me before I collect my last words and complete them, I would like to list the framework of my own views on what we understand of the method and solution to the Kurdish question.

1. It should be ensured that the armed struggle is ended by negotiating with its interlocutors. Fast, effective, and permanent results should be obtained by making legal regulations on this subject.
2. All legal and administrative obstacles to democratic politics should be removed. Demonstrations, strikes, marches, rallies, organizations, and freedom of expression should be harmonized with universal standards.
3. The final solution to the Kurdish question rests in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. In this respect, all political parties are parties to the solution. The main goal should be to solve the Kurdish question and all social problems with a new, emancipatory civilian constitution.
4. A constitutional guarantee for the acceptance of the Kurds as a people, the use of their native language freely in all public spaces, the preservation and development of their history and culture, an organization with their own identity, and the recognition of their right to govern themselves within the unity of Turkey with the administrative model to be achieved with the most appropriate consensus.
5. Investigating the suffering and crimes committed in the past and facing the truth.

6. Subjecting the state to reorganization with the scientific, objective history and democratic republic model by abandoning the imposition of an official ideology and official history and switching to critical, pedagogical, and scientific education.
7. Dismissal of criminal cases arising as a result of the Kurdish question, abolition of the Turkish Counterterrorism Law, and release of all political prisoners.

These issues are, of course, also discussed outside and will be discussed further. If everyone expresses their opinions and all these are provided, and if an environment of free discussion is granted, we will have the opportunity to solve every problem in Turkey through political methods, negotiation, and peace. I hope this case will contribute to that. The solution to the Kurdish question will allow the whole of Turkey to breathe. The money deducted from the pockets, tables, and stomachs of eighty-four million people will not be spent on war, death, blood, and tears but on investment and development. The Republic of Turkey will strengthen its regional peace mission by taking the Kurds with it, and all Kurds, especially the millions of Kurds living in Iraq, Syria, and Iran, will support the growth of Turkey's democracy and economy. Above all, there will be no deaths in Turkey; the funerals of our young people will not ravage the hearts of mothers and fathers and destroy our homes. The tension of polarization will decrease, and living together in a more peaceful Turkey will result in a dignified and virtuous life for everyone.

Our call is primarily to our Turkish brothers—in Edirne, İzmir, Samsun, Adana, Kırşehir, and most of all Ankara. We Kurds are in favor of living together in the eighty-one provinces. We only want reassurance regarding our identity, culture, language, history, and political agency. These are our most natural, fundamental human rights as a people. If the Turkish people see the Kurdish people as brothers, they should defend their rights more strongly and willingly than we, [the Kurds], do. We must now solve our problems of identity, belief, and sect together and expand the struggle that focuses on poverty, unemployment, and exploitation. The main issue is the class struggle, the struggle for labor and bread. To date, we have tried to carry out both struggles intertwined, but if the problems based on national identity and belief are solved, the class struggle can be carried out in a stronger and more consequential way. For this reason, we also call on all left-wing socialist forces in Turkey and encourage them to support and contribute to a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. Our party should be confident,

take the initiative in ensuring peace, and use its competence and will to the fullest for a peaceful solution. As the Kurdish people, we have been looking for solutions and paying heavy prices for 150 years. This case was one of them. Now, as we approach the end of the case, I would like to say this once again with all my heart. Let the prices we pay lead to peace; we will even give up our lives. God willing, everyone will learn the right lessons from all this, and we will return to negotiation and go back to the table to ensure the dignified peace we promised to our people.

—Translated by Isabelle McRae

Notes

- 1 These excerpts were selected by editors of this issue, Mashuq Kurt and Nilay Özok-Gündoğan, after obtaining Demirtaş's permission for publication through his legal representatives, and he has approved the final version in Turkish before its translation by Isabelle McRae. The piece is slightly edited, and some repetitions are removed for fluency and linguistic purposes.
- 2 Translator's note: Demirtaş uses the third person in his testimony. Sometimes, this refers to the HDP party, sometimes the Kurdish movement, and sometimes the Kurdish people. References to İmralı refer to the prison in the Sea of Marmara where PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan has been imprisoned since 1999.