

Gandhi visits Öcalan again

A dialogue on peace, non-violence, and self-governance

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People gathered at a Freedom for Öcalan rally in Germany

This is a recorded transcript of a conversation that was held on 30 June 2025, between Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (also known as Mahatma Gandhi) and Abdullah Öcalan, activist-ideologue leader of the Kurdish freedom struggle. It took place in Imrali Prison, on a Turkish island, where Öcalan has been held prisoner for 26 years. This is the second conversation between the two; the first took place in August 2023¹.

Mohandas: Greetings, Heval Öcalan! I am so happy to be able to visit you again.

Abdullah (with a twinkle in his eyes): Namaste and zindabad, Mahatma!

I can see you are in good spirits, and teasing me already! You know I don't like being called that.

Indeed, I am only pulling your leg ... I feel we bonded so well last time, you feel like a father-figure to me, and having read more about your life and works, I think you are indeed a great soul. But yes, I too, don't like these epithets, so I'll refrain. But tell me, how goes it in the afterlife? What brings you here again?

Well, this afterlife continues to be quite a happening place, especially with so many wars and violence on earth, we get new martyrs joining us all the time! I've even managed to meet some of your women colleagues, and we have had fascinating conversations.

Oh, really? I so miss talking to the women of our freedom struggle, they have been such a backbone ...

Indeed, I was humbled by their honesty and humanity! But I'm back here now, partly because our dialogue last time was so incomplete, but mostly because of what is happening in your region these days. While I would love to talk about it all – Israel-Palestine-Iran, the continued imperialism of the USA, and so on – I know we won't have that much time. So, I'm mostly here to understand what must be a momentous occasion for the Kurds – the dissolution of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK, in short, I believe it is called? I heard that in March, you issued a call for such a step, and that the PKK has indeed taken it. I have many questions for you, but first, that's an amazing step towards non-violence, congratulations!

Indeed, this has happened, Gandhiji, and I am glad it has. We had to break the cycle of violence somehow, and ...

Sorry to interrupt, Abdullah – I hope I may call you that, now that we have gained a degree of familiarity - but this reminds me of our last conversation, where you defended violence, but only as a form of self-defence.

Yes, indeed ... and we reserve our right to revert to various forms of self-defence should Turkey refuse to accept our peace offering, and continue its aggression towards us. But we want to give peace a full chance, and to my mind, this is a powerful step towards that.

I hope so too! But I'm intrigued – almost no revolutionary political party in the world has dissolved itself; they always argue that their work as a vanguard of change remains. What motivated you to call for the PKK's dissolution, especially given that Kurdish freedom is still far away?

Yes, that's what everyone is asking me. Perhaps most people do not know that the dissolution of the PKK was built into its very conception. It was formed in 1978, and soon after it started we had said that it has the limited goal of putting the Kurdish struggle on the map, and helping build ground-level people's power, after which it may no longer need to exist. As you have recalled from our conversation last time, its use of violence was always purely for self-defence, and we were always looking for a way that this could be stopped. Now, I believe Kurdish society has matured enough, has acquired substantial radical people's power, and also that the world now knows about our struggle. So, I felt, and I think so did many in our movement, that perhaps the PKK is no longer necessary. Actually, some rethinking of its role

has been going on for many years. For instance, we were always striving to change it from its original form when it was structured heirarchically and held power in its own hands, to become a party that enabled self-governance by people themselves. I've explained this in a little booklet that you could read – called *War and Peace in Kurdistan*². Any party that concentrates power, like the ones in the so-called socialist states of Russia and China, is contrary to the principles of the Kurdish movement, contrary to true democracy and freedom.

Ah! Do you know that after India gained independence from British colonial rule, I had advised the Indian National Congress, the main political party that helped bring us freedom, to distribute itself across India and help villages reach their true potential as 'little republics'. Unfortunately, my very dear and beloved friend Jawaharlal Nehru and others in the party had different ideas. Perhaps they were also nervous because what was once a single potential nation had been split into two – India and Pakistan – and this partition had already caused a lot of violence. Also, they felt that for India to regain standing on its own two feet, a centralized economy was more suitable. Whatever the reasons, I think this has been a costly mistake, because it has, like you said, concentrated power in the hands of a small political elite. Whether it is the Congress or its main national rival, the BJP, the pattern is the same. Not to mention that a centralized, heavy industry and infrastructure-based economy has also weakened the potential for people's self-reliance, even more so now with private corporations becoming too powerful.

Mr. Gandhi – sorry, I feel hesitant using your first name, given how much older and wiser you are ...

(smiling): Nonsense! You must call me Mohandas, maybe it will make me feel young again!

Ok, Mohandas, if you insist. What I was saying was that you've identified two of the most serious problems of today's world. One, the division into these rigid nation-states, and second, the global domination of capitalist modernity. The former creates a divisive sense of 'nationalism', and in a situation of intense globalized economic competition, a hostile feeling of 'us' vs. 'them'. One country feels no compunction about exploiting another if this helps it achieve higher economic growth and more profits. Take a third factor, the spread of religious and ethnic hatred by a few self-professed dogmatists, and we have a toxic blend that the entire world is reeling under.

No doubt ... and of course, we know that a form of western modernity imposed on the world through colonial conquest is one of the roots of these problems. But these are complex problems, and the multiple crises the world faces today – war, ecological and climate collapse, inequality, authoritarianism - seem almost intractable. And this cursed ideology that is today called 'development', where we are willingly copying the West – a so-called civilisation I had criticized more than a century ago! – still holds sway in most parts of the earth. How do you think your latest move, dissolving the PKK, can help solve these crises? Of course, I know that no such step by itself can be an answer, but does it indicate some directions in which to head?

Oh, we are under no delusion that such a step by itself can solve anything. This attempt at creating a space for peaceful dialogue is only one of many that the Kurdish movement is trying. You are perhaps aware of our ground-level attempts to create genuine democracy – you told me last time that you called it *swaraj*, about which I still want to learn more, based on ecological, feminist, ethical-spiritual foundations. We call this democratic modernity, or where several communities and ethnicities join together across a larger landscape, we call it *democratic confederalism*. And one of the foundations of these is what we call *jineoloji*, the art and science of women's freedom. This grounded praxis has proceeded despite the Turkish state and others trying to undermine it. With our latest move, we are signaling to the world that through peaceful dialogue, we want to create more space for the full flowering of such transformations. Only in this way can we achieve people's full potential for self-governance in tune with the earth. In fact, we hope that this could become an example for the whole of our region, which desperately needs pathways out of decades of conflict and violence that colonial and post-colonial forces have brought to it.

Indeed, what you are striving for is not far from my notion of *swaraj* – I am glad you recall it from our last meeting. It means full freedom and autonomy, power being in the hands of people, but with responsibility towards the freedom and autonomy of others. A seamless blend of politics with spirituality (not, mind you, dogmatic religion!), responsibilities with rights, independence with interconnectedness – a society of *sarvodaya* - where all can benefit. Back home in India, many grassroots movements are trying this, though the government is going in the completely opposite direction.

There is a moment of silence, both lost in reflection, and both aware that the conversation is to end soon.

Tell me, Abdullah – will the PKK cadre now go back into civilian life, and help your people take their peaceful revolution further? And what if Turkey continues its acts of aggression against the Kurdish people, will you call for the re-establishment of the PKK?

Well, I can't say what the PKK cadre will do, it's too early to tell, but yes, I do hope they will engage themselves in grounding their ideas and ideals. As for what we will do if Turkey does not respect our call for peaceful dialogue – well, you know, Mohandas, the right of self-defence is a fundamental right. Every creature will do what it can to defend its life. I would not want us to return to any form of violence, nor would I want to risk undermining people's power by setting up a centralised political party. I trust that the Kurdish people will find innovative ways of responding, without falling back on such solutions.

Well, as I mentioned last time, I believe that violence in self-defence is superior to cowardly giving in - but I sincerely hope it won't be necessary to resort to it. One last question - with this new development, is Turkey likely to release you from this confinement they have cruelly imposed on you for 26 years?

I don't know, Mohandas. I hope so. I would so love to roam the beautiful valleys and hills of Kurdistan, eat food and sip tea with my comrades, visit the extraordinary people who have been so resilient through all these decades of struggle, see for myself the experiments at democratic confederalism and jineoloji. But I am confident that even if I remain confined here, the Kurdish people are strong enough to resist and eventually win their freedom.

I trust that is so. This is the self-confidence with which we threw out the British colonial power, though I have to admit that new forms of colonialism are being imposed by our own rulers now! Time for another freedom struggle in India... well, I would have loved to chat more, but I was given only an hour. I hope I can come a third time – all good things happen in threes, I'm told!

Safe travels back, Mohandas. Do reserve a place for me where you are, though who knows if I deserve to be there!

Oh, you more than anyone else deserve to be there—or wherever else your soul wishes. I would be glad to have you there, maybe we can jointly stir up some trouble! But you still have a few decades on this earth, Inshallah – and will see your people freed of oppressive regimes.

Inshallah indeed. Go well, and may we meet again. *Jin jiyan azadi, and zindabad!*

Acknowledgments: This piece has benefited from online conversations organized by the Global Tapestry of Alternatives, on Öcalan's call to the PKK to disband and disarm³, and the PKK's subsequent actions honouring this call⁴.

References

¹ Mohandas Gandhi speaks to Abdullah Öcalan on [Meer](#).

² War and Peace in Kurdistan by Abdullah Öcalan at [Freedom for Öcalan](#).

³ What does Abdullah Öcalan's "Call for Peace and Democratic Society" mean? at [Global Tapestry Of Alternatives](#).

⁴ Laying down arms: What does PKK's dissolution mean for Kurdish freedom movement? at [Global Tapestry Of Alternatives](#).

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Ashish Kothari

An environmentalist based in India, Ashish has helped found several national and global organisations and networks. Views expressed in this column do not necessarily represent the views of any of these.

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1. Jinwar Women's village, Kurdistan - asserting resistance to occupation by the nation-state @ Firat News Agency
2. Abdullah Öcalan with DEM Party delegates in February 2025, where he called on the PKK to disarm
3. Kurdish women's movement rally
4. Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan, long imprisoned, remains a powerful symbol of resistance, political thought, and the Kurdish struggle for autonomy
5. Kurdish women with photos of martyrs
6. Sirri Sureyya Onder, parliamentarian for the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), and Pervin Buldan, member of the İmralı Delegation of the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party, on a rare visit to Abdullah Öcalan in 2014

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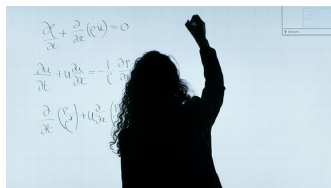
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