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# TURKEY'S USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN SOUTH KURDISTAN CONTINUES

Why is the OPCW Not Acting Against  
the Use of Banned Weapons?

Committee Against the Use of Chemical Weapons in South Kurdistan  
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# INTRODUCTION

Never before has Turkey committed more war crimes than in 2022. The international focus on the war in Ukraine and on the regional threat of a new Turkish attack on the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria cannot negate the fact that Turkey's operation 'Claw Lock' in North Iraq has led to hundreds of cases of war crimes, including the intensive use of chemical weapons. While international attention and media coverage has helped corroborate Turkey's involvement in the death of dozens of civilians in South Kurdistan [North Iraq], the repeated accusations of Kurdish representatives regarding the use of chemical weapons by the Turkish army have not yet led to the necessary investigations of international organizations and institutions such as the OPCW. This failure to act and officially clarify these drastic allegations have allowed Turkey to not only continue but even increase its war crimes in the wake of its heavy attacks on South Kurdistan. When it comes to the use of chemical weapons, the international community should not leave the smallest doubt that it takes these extremely concerning allegations very seriously. Increased media coverage, on-site visits by delegations and official investigations are therefore urgently needed to show Turkey that it cannot continue committing war crimes with impunity.



Due to Turkey's use of chemical weapons guerrilla fighter wear gas masks in their tunnel positions in South Kurdistan.

# 1. VICTIMS OF TURKISH CHEMICAL WEAPONS ATTACKS INCREASE

## *Chemical Attacks in 2021*

Turkey began to systematically and intensely use chemical weapons in April 2021, when it started an all-out occupation attack against South Kurdistan officially speaking of two operations codenamed 'Claw-Lighting' and 'Claw-Thunderbolt'. In 2021 alone, the HPG (People's Defense Forces) reported 367 chemical weapons attacks as a result of which 40 HPG guerrilla fighters were killed in the South Kurdish areas Siyanê, Zendura, Mamreşo, Girê Sor and Werxelê (1).

Since many of the areas in which the Turkish army has used chemical weapons are populated by local villagers, civilians were also directly affected. The South Kurdish NGO CPT-Iraq (Community Peacemaker Teams - Iraq) reported that on September 4, 2021 the local villagers Haji Abdullah Hiruri, his wife and their daughter were attacked in their village Hirure by artillery shelling. According to CPT-Iraq "an unknown chemical agent was used by Turkey in the attack. When the three of them gained consciousness they began vomiting

1 <https://anfenglish.com/kurdistan/hsm-releases-balance-sheet-of-war-for-2021-57191>

and had severe burns. They were found by neighbors and taken to Zaxo hospital". (2) The number of affected civilians is believed to be much higher. Yet, the local KDP security forces are suspected of having threatened affected civilians and doctors who treated them so that they don't publicly speak of the affects Turkey's use of chemical weapons has had on the local civilian population. (3)

### *Chemical Attacks in 2022*

In 2022, Turkey has drastically increased its use of chemical weapons in South Kurdistan, especially against guerrilla positions. Since the start of renewed heavy attacks on April 14, the HPG has reported more than 1300 chemical weapons attacks by the Turkish army. (4) According to the HPG, 14 of its members have been killed with chemical weapons this year alone, namely Rohat Dengdar, Şevîn Şemzînan, Şerda Sosin, Xemgîn Qelqelî, Zilan Besê, Denîz Reş, Sema Agirîn, Demhat Derweş, Binevş Agal, Çiya Amed, Beritan Sine, Ronî Bakî, Devran Riha and Zerdeşt Ranya. Since the number of chemical weapons attacks is already more than four times higher than in 2021 and only expected to increase, the likelihood of more victims among the civilian population of South Kurdistan and the guerrilla forces is high.

### *Types of Chemical Weapons Used by Turkey*

Regarding the chemical weapons used during Turkey's attacks, the nerve gas Tabun, a suffocating gas containing Chloropicrin/Green Cross, Sulphur Mustard/Yellow Cross and a gas that causes memory loss and periodic paralysis were identified by the HPG. (5) The nerve gas Tabun was reported to cause immobility of the human body and the death of a person in a short time. The gas containing Chloropicrin/Green Cross was first developed by Germany during World War I. It causes death by suffocation. Sulphur Mustard/Yellow Cross was also originally produced by Germany and causes the drying out and burning of the human body. Additionally, tear gas has been used in the closed tunnel positions of the guerrilla forces also having a lethal

2 <https://cptik.org/reports-1/2021/8/23/updates-on-turkish-military-operation-claw-lightning>

3 <https://www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Turkey-War-Report-Sweeney-V31.pdf>

4 This number is based on the daily and monthly balance sheets published by the HPG.

5 <https://anfddeutsch.com/hintergrund/karayilan-einsatz-von-funf-verschiedenen-chemikalien-dokumentiert-29549>

effect. Until today, Turkey has only admitted to using one type of these banned weapons when Defense Minister Hulusi Akar explained during a parliamentary session in November 2021 that the Turkish army was using tear gas for its attacks on the guerrilla's tunnel positions in South Kurdistan. According to international law, the use of tear gas in closed spaces is clearly banned.

### *International Media Coverage*

International media has repeatedly reported on Turkey's use of chemical weapons in South Kurdistan. This includes articles in the Jerusalem Post (6), Medya News (7), the German newspaper Junge Welt (8), France24 (9), the London-based online newspaper The New Arab (10), the Greek newspaper Greek City Times (11), the Turkish online medium Bianet (12), the Iraqi media outlet Shafaq (13), the international media platform Open Democracy (14), the British newspaper Morning Star (15) or Pime Asia News (16).



Turkish soldiers left behind equipment for the use of chemical weapons during their attack on the South Kurdish area Garê.

6 <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-689654>

7 <https://medyanews.net/turkey-can-use-chemical-weapons-with-impunity/>

8 <https://www.jungewelt.de/artikel/425285.reportage-koloniale-kontinuit%C3%A4ten.html>

9 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211203-kurdish-protesters-storm-chemical-weapons-body>

10 <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/turkey-used-chemical-weapons-pkk-fighters-kck-spox>

11 <https://greekcitytimes.com/2022/01/11/turkey-ignores-chemical-weapons/>

12 <https://m.bianet.org/english/world/252878-call-for-an-investigation-into-turkey-s-use-of-chemical-weapons-in-iraqi-kurdistan>

13 <https://shafaq.com/en/Kurdistan/PKK-accuses-Turkey-of-using-chemical-weapons-in-the-Claw-Lock-operation>

14 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/kurdish-group-claims-turkey-is-using-chemical-weapons-why-is-nobody-investigating/>

15 <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/turkey-accused-of-war-crimes-as-chemical-weapons-used-44-times>

16 <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/PKK:-Ankara-used-chemical-weapons-in-%27at-least-300-attacks%27-in-Kurdistan-54440.html>

### *Video Evidence of Use of Chemical Weapons*

Since the renewed start of Turkey's attacks, the HPG has published several videos indicating the use of chemical weapons by the Turkish army. In a video published on June 25, 2022, traces of chemical weapons can be seen in the form of white and yellow powder in a tunnel position of the guerrilla. (17) In the video, an HPG member reports that due to the traces of chemical weapons everywhere in the tunnel the constant use of protective masks is necessary since in case of movement the powder mixes with the air and causes instant suffocation. A video published on July 16 from the South Kurdish area Werxelê shows three Turkish soldiers preparing the use of chemical weapons against what appears to be a tunnel position of the guerrilla. (18) They can be seen pushing a long hose into the tunnel. The hose itself is attached to what looks like a high pressure device with which the chemical weapons are pumped into the underground tunnel systems. On July 17, the HPG published another video reportedly showing a canister with a type of chemical weapon in the form of powder. (19) A member of the HPG reports in the video that this powder was used on July 10, 2022 during an attack by the Turkish army on guerrilla tunnel positions in the South Kurdish area Girê Amêdî (Amêdî Hill).



Since April 2022, the Turkish army has carried out more than 1300 chemical weapons attacks in South Kurdistan.

17 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/features/footage-from-guerrilla-areas-after-turkish-attack-with-chemical-weapons-60785>

18 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/features/turkish-army-preparations-to-use-chemical-weapons-captured-on-video-61230>

19 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/guerrilla-documents-capsule-with-chemical-agent-61256>



In cities all over the world hundreds of protests have taken place against Turkey's use of chemical weapons.

## 2. INTERNATIONAL PROTESTS AGAINST TURKEY'S USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

### *International Statements Condemning Turkey*

Ever since its renewed attacks on South Kurdistan, Turkey has been facing international criticism. A variety of organizations, parties, institutions and well-known individuals have condemned Turkey's attempt to occupy South Kurdistan and have called on the international community to bring an end to the Turkish attacks. Organizations such as the NGO CPT-Iraq (20), Progressive International (21), the Kurdistan Democratic Communities Union (KCK) (22), the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) (23) and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) (24) have openly criticized Turkey for its war policy and have

20 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/christian-peacemaker-teams-call-for-turkey-to-stop-attacks-on-south-kurdistan-59396>

21 <https://progressive.international/wire/2021-06-14-defend-kurdistan-against-turkish-occupation/en/>

22 <https://kck-info.com/statement-apr1922/>

23 <http://www.kongrakurdistan.eu/en/stop-turkish-genocidal-military-operations-against-kurds-and-kurdistan/>

24 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/democratic-socialists-of-america-condemn-nato-and-us-complicity-in-turkey-s-aggression-in-kurdistan-61039>

called for an immediate end of the attacks. Political parties from all over the world have also taken a stance against Turkey's war in South Kurdistan, e.g. the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (25), Sinn Féin (26), parties from Turkey and North Kurdistan including the People's Democratic Party (HDP) (27), members of the Austrian Green Party (28), Green Party MPs from Germany (29), the Die Linke governor of the German federal state Thüringen Bodo Ramelow (30), German Green Party MP Berivan Aymaz (31), DIE LINKE's Spokeswoman for Foreign and Peace Policy in the European Parliament Özlem Alev Demirel (32), the Socialist Party of Malaysia (33), Heinz Bierbaum, the President of the European Left (34), or the Left Party of Sweden (35). The Iraqi President Berhem Salih (36), the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs (37) and the former Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki (38) were also quick to protest against Turkey's attacks. Furthermore, the Scottish Trade Union Congress (39), 16 British trade unions (40) and the Parliament of Catalonia (41) have passed resolutions condemning Turkey's war policy in South Kurdistan.

### *International Protests*

Protests have taken place regularly in cities all over the world. These include repeated protests in cities all over Europe (42), a demonstration during a

25 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/puk-group-chair-axa-says-turkish-state-s-invasion-attacks-violate-sovereignty-of-iraq-59401>

26 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/sinn-fein-expresses-concern-over-turkish-assault-on-kurds-in-iraq-59841>

27 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/kurdish-parties-institutions-release-joint-statement-against-turkish-offensive-59419>

28 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/journalists-and-parliamentarians-condemn-turkey-s-attacks-against-kurdistan-59454>

29 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/journalists-and-parliamentarians-condemn-turkey-s-attacks-against-kurdistan-59454>

30 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/turkish-aggression-in-south-kurdistan-draws-world-wide-reaction-59462>

31 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/turkish-aggression-in-south-kurdistan-draws-world-wide-reaction-59462>

32 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/turkish-aggression-in-south-kurdistan-draws-world-wide-reaction-59462>

33 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/scottish-trade-unions-condemn-turkish-invasion-of-northern-iraq-59610>

34 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/european-left-condemns-iraqi-attacks-on-Sengal-and-turkish-attacks-in-iraq-59775>

35 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/scottish-trade-unions-condemn-turkish-invasion-of-northern-iraq-59610>

36 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/iraqi-president-barham-salih-turkish-state-s-attacks-are-clear-threat-to-national-security-59410>

37 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/iraq-hands-turkey-a-diplomatic-note-calling-for-withdrawal-of-turkish-troops-59420>

38 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/former-prime-minister-of-iraq-al-maliki-condemns-attacks-carried-out-by-turkey-59451>

39 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/scottish-trade-unions-condemn-turkish-invasion-of-northern-iraq-59610>

40 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/16-british-trade-unions-send-letter-to-turkish-ambassador-condemning-attacks-60038>

41 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/parliament-of-catalonia-condemns-turkey-s-invasion-attacks-in-kurdistan-59724>

42 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/kurds-in-europe-take-to-the-streets-against-turkish-invasion-attacks-59507>

visit of the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) Masrour Barzani in London (43), protests in the South Kurdish city Sulaimaniyah (44), a demonstration of thousands at the Turkish-Iraqi border crossing (45), a rally of thousands in the German capital Berlin (46), the protest of more than 20.000 people from all over Europe in the German city Düsseldorf (47), an international action day with protests all over the world on June 11 (48) and a vigil in front of the OPCW in The Hague (49).

### *Delegations to South Kurdistan*

This year, several international delegations have visited South Kurdistan in order to hold talks with South Kurdish representatives and get on-the-ground information on the use of chemical weapons by Turkey, including a delegation of British trade unionists, journalists and politicians (50), an international delegation including Progressive International Spokesperson Daniel Kopp (51) and a peace delegation from Europe (52).

## **3. RELUCTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS**

Despite the serious allegations regarding Turkey's use of chemical weapons, ample proof e.g. in the form of videos and ongoing international protests, the international community and its responsible institutions such as the OPCW have so far failed to hold Turkey responsible, let alone seriously investigate the matter.

43 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/kurdish-youth-protest-masrour-barzani-in-london-59438>

44 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/sulaymaniyah-people-protest-against-turkish-attacks-59457>

45 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/thousands-protest-against-turkey-s-war-at-south-kurdistan-border-59595>

46 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/thousands-march-against-occupation-and-betrayal-in-berlin-59932>

47 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/thousands-in-dusseldorf-against-turkish-war-policy-and-chemical-weapons-60797>

48 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/british-kurdish-people-s-assembly-invites-people-to-join-the-global-action-defend-kurdistan-60419>

49 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/vigil-in-front-of-opcw-against-turkish-attacks-and-international-silence-continues-60031>

50 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/british-delegation-calls-for-trial-of-erdogan-and-investigation-into-chemical-weapons-use-58717>

51 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/peace-delegation-in-sulaymaniyah-for-talks-60461>

52 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/internationalist-peace-delegation-from-europe-visits-binare-qandil-60381>



The guerrilla fighter Gülpérin Ata was killed during a chemical weapons attack by Turkey in South Kurdistan.

The reaction of government officials or representatives of international institutions has so far mostly varied between respectful neglect or active obstruction. An unfortunate example is that of the British journalist Steve Sweeney who collected the findings of his more than one year long research into Turkey's use of chemical weapons. When he wanted to submit his comprehensive report "Collusion, Conspiracy & Corruption: An 'on the Ground' Report Into Turkish War Crimes and Use of Chemical Weapons" (53) along with soil samples, video footage and a letter demanding a fact-finding team is sent to South Kurdistan to carry out investigations, the OPCW refused to receive him. For unclear reasons, the flight Steve Sweeney had planned to take on May 17 to The Hague was canceled thus making it impossible for him to join the vigil in front of the OPCW and submit his findings that day. (54) Additionally, it was impossible to find laboratories in Europe that would analyze oil samples that had been taken to Europe from guerrilla positions attacked with chemical weapons in South Kurdistan. All requests made to laboratories in different countries were declined.

53 <https://www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Turkey-War-Report-Sweeney-V31.pdf>

54 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/journalist-steve-sweeney-opcw-has-slammed-the-door-in-our-faces-again-59996>

When governments around the world were contacted by the KCK in May 2022 regarding the use of chemical weapons by Turkey, the responses were vague and even justified Turkey's war policy as a defense against terrorism. Some governments were quick to refer any request for investigations to the OPCW which, as can be seen above, has been very careful not to react at all. Similarly, in a statement on April 28, 2022, the German government failed to address the allegation of Turkey's use of chemical weapons and instead justified Turkey's attacks as an act of self-defense and the fight against terrorism. (55)

### *5. Danger of International Silence and Concessions*

In recent years, the international community has proven repeatedly that it cares greatly about any allegation concerning the use of chemical weapons. In the case of the war in Syria that has been raging for more than 10 years, but also in the course of the more recent war in Ukraine, reports about the possible use of chemical weapons have led to broad media attention and international investigations. The same is now necessary with regards to Turkey's attacks on South Kurdistan. Delegations comprised of chemical weapons experts need to urgently visit the affected areas and international investigations need to be started. If the international community continues to fail to live up to its responsibility and does not make use of its expertise, e.g. that of the OPCW, it will allow Turkey to carry out even more war crimes against the civilian population of South Kurdistan and the guerrilla forces based there. Turkey's recent attack on the village Perex in the South Kurdish Zaxo area in which 9 civilians were killed and 23 wounded clearly shows that Turkey has been heartened by the silence of the international community and thinks that it has been given a green light to commit war crimes wherever it wants. (56) The unfortunate result of this silence will be complicity in Turkey's war crimes. Instead of giving in to Turkish pressure as was the case with Finland's and Sweden's admission to NATO, the international community needs to take the allegations of the use of chemical weapons seriously, have experts look into the matter and put pressure on Turkey to stop committing war crimes in South Kurdistan.

55 <https://anfddeutsch.com/aktuelles/grunes-aussenministerium-stellt-sich-hinter-turkischen-angriffskrieg-31900>

56 <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/07/iraq-pm-blames-turkey-after-kurdistan-shelling-kills-9-civilians>

### *6. Permanent Vigil in Front of OPCW*

Very recently, the uncle of Gülperin Ata, who was killed in a chemical weapons attack by Turkey on May 23, 2022, has decided to start a permanent vigil in front of the OPCW in The Hague. He has decided to express his protest since the OPCW has so far failed to react to any of the calls to investigate the matter and has thus not lived up to its responsibility to take any allegations of the use of chemical weapons seriously.

Until today, dozens of Kurdish guerrilla fighters like Gülperin Ata have been killed with chemical weapons by Turkey. Yet, despite the numerous calls of their families, the Kurdish public, journalists, civil rights organizations, activists, human rights organizations, politicians, MPs and hundreds of thousands of protesters, the OPCW has not started any investigations into Turkey's use of chemical weapons. This constitutes a matter of great concern for us. The attitude of the OPCW only encourages Turkey to continue committing war crimes. Although chemical weapons are not only being used against the Kurdish self-defense forces but also against the civilian villagers in the affected South Kurdish areas and despite the fact that the British journalist Steve Sweeney has collected ample evidence, the OPCW has so far refused to live up to its tasks. Unfortunately, this indicates that the OPCW and certain states do not respect the treaties they themselves have agreed on which constitutes a clear breach of these very treaties. Not living up to its own tasks means that the OPCW is deceiving the international public about its own work. If the OPCW wants to protect the international public's trust and respect, it needs to urgently pay attention to the calls for an investigation into Turkey's use of chemical weapons and immediately send a delegation to the affected areas in South Kurdistan.



To protest the murder of Gülperin Ata, her uncle has started a permanent vigil in front of the OPCW.