YOUTH FOR PEACE:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE AND LASTING PEACE

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INTRODUCTION

Over time, protracted conflicts extend beyond disputes between opposing parties, reshaping social relations and affecting the fabric of society as a whole. This cycle of structural violence deepens social divisions, marginalises certain groups and fosters hatred, reproducing itself by continually rendering particular communities disposable. Therefore, the silencing of weapons alone does not mean that violence has ended. A state of calm achieved without addressing the structural problems generated by a protracted conflict creates the conditions for structural violence to persist in other forms. This is one of the key factors that make peace processes fragile and undermine their sustainability.

Although the Kurdish issue in Türkiye is no longer characterized by active conflict, this has yet to translate into a process of legal and social reckoning and reparation. Establishing genuine peace is only possible if the process has a 'transformative' character. A fundamental prerequisite for such an approach is to move the peace process beyond closed-door negotiations confined to state institutions and open it up to all segments of society. The negotiation process that has unfolded since 2024 and been made public through a framework law has focused on the conditions for disarmament and the legal framework. While these are significant milestones, creating an inclusive and open environment for discussion is essential to building social peace. The more directly communities/individuals affected by the conflict are enabled to participate in peacebuilding, the greater their capacity and commitment to safeguard and advance the process.

The peace process should be pursued through a holistic approach encompassing democratisation, confronting the past, gender equality, social and economic justice, ecological restoration, and redressing the harms caused by forced displacement. Moving beyond the mere absence of conflict requires transforming security-oriented practices and establishing inclusive, restorative justice mechanisms that address past harms and contribute to healing social wounds.

Although active conflict has ceased, large-scale projects in the region continue to damage ecosystems and perpetuate forms of control and domination. Achieving restorative peace therefore requires rethinking the living environments affected by the conflict. An ecologically grounded approach to green transitional justice must be adopted to foster a holistic and sustainable vision of peace.

It is also important to consider which generations are participating in the peace process and whose future is being shaped by it. Young people are key stakeholders in the process, both because of their demographic significance and because of the ways in which conflict affects their education, employment and future expectations. Nevertheless, young people remain significantly underrepresented in the institutional structures of the current negotiation process.

In Türkiye, discussions on social peace and peace negotiations often take place without young people, despite their being one of the most dynamic segments of the population. Instead, they are frequently treated as passive recipients of policy rather than as active participants in shaping the process. Yet, in light of the historical legacy of conflict, young people

must be recognized both as individuals whose lives have been shaped by compulsory military service, security policies, economic crises and social polarisation, and as actors who have at times been drawn into instrumentalised political agendas.

Young people should not, however, be treated as a homogeneous age group. The expectations and concerns of young people vary depending on whether they live in urban or rural areas, their mother tongue and ethnic identity, and their socioeconomic background. Although research points to structural disorganisation and political alienation, this does not mean that young people are indifferent to political processes. Rather, the findings suggest that young people remain interested in public affairs but perceive existing mechanisms of representation and participation as ineffective, inaccessible or inadequate for expressing their views and concerns.

Strengthening youth participation is therefore one of the key conditions shaping the success of the peace process. Ensuring that the diverse experiences and expectations of young people are reflected in decision-making will help embed peace in society and strengthen its long-term sustainability.

The recommendations below were prepared as part of the Youth for Peace project carried out by Hafıza Merkezi (Truth, Justice, Memory Center) in 2026. They were formulated by a group of young people aged 20–30 from different regions of Türkiye and with diverse ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds, selected through an open call. While the group does not claim to be representative of young people as a whole,

its members came together to participate in a training programme on peace and experienced both the excitement and the challenges of collectively developing ideas through open discussion in a free environment. Grounded in the principles of equal citizenship, the right to participation, transparency, truth and nonviolence, this document sets out the expectations, aspirations and concrete recommendations of young people committed to peace.

1. CONFRONTING THE PAST, JUSTICE AND MEMORY

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) and Decision-Makers

a) **A "Commission on Confronting the Past" should be established, with the direct representation of victims' families and human rights organisations, to investigate grave human rights violations committed in the past, enforced disappearances and unsolved murders.** Administrative and judicial impunity for grave human rights violations committed during the conflict must end. Statutes of limitations and confidentiality restrictions must be lifted to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. Cases of gender-based violence committed during the conflict and forced displacement must be documented through specific procedures that do not further compound the harm suffered by victims. Comprehensive reparation mechanisms must be put in place. Femicide and the murder of children must receive particular attention, and documentation

processes and interviews must be conducted in safe spaces, with the involvement of independent legal professionals, academics, researchers, psychologists and activists.

b) **Inclusive truth-seeking mechanisms and a transformative model of justice grounded in accountability must be adopted.** Since the report of the "Commission on National Solidarity, Fraternity and Democracy" excludes intersectional issues, there is a need for complementary and inclusive truth-seeking mechanisms that guarantee gender representation and ensure the participation of civil society organisations. In addition, research and truth-seeking mechanisms should be developed to confront the processes of ethnic cleansing, massacres, displacement and the destruction of cultural rights that have targeted different communities and groups since the late Ottoman period. These mechanisms should involve diverse segments of society, including survivors, civil society organisations and academics.

Recommendations for Public Institutions and Local Governments

c) **Practices involving the destruction of structures belonging to different peoples' linguistic and cultural heritage, as well as the changing of place names, should be investigated, and their impact on the cultural memory, sense of belonging and public visibility of the communities concerned should be documented in reports.** Participatory mechanisms should

be established in processes concerning the destruction of cultural heritage and the changing of place names, taking into account the views of local communities and their accumulated historical knowledge. In addition, public archives relating to past name changes, language bans and practices affecting property rights should be made accessible to researchers. Museums and public spaces of memory should adopt a pluralistic approach that recognises the histories and cultural heritage of different communities, as well as the human rights violations they have suffered.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

d) **Space should be created for young people to engage in memory work and initiatives focused on a shared future.** Protracted conflict in Türkiye has deepened the emotional and social distance between young people from different communities. Cultural and geographical divisions have limited opportunities for young people to learn about one another's lives and experiences. To bridge these divides and strengthen social relations, civil society organisations should continue their work focused on memory, dialogue and a shared future, and be enabled to carry out their activities in a free and safe environment. A transparent, accessible and independent funding mechanism should be established to support projects in this field. Field visits, research projects, memory walks, youth exchange programmes, and collaborative artistic and documentary productions that bring together young people from different

regions and communities should be implemented through cooperation among schools, universities, local governments and civil society organisations.

2. PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), Civil Society Organisations and Local Governments

a) **Participatory mechanisms operating from the local level upwards should be established.** Decisions concerning the peace process should be made with the equal and effective participation of communities and individuals directly affected by the process, young people, civil society, and human rights and professional organisations. A minimum 50% gender quota should be applied. Existing peace initiatives should be supported and cooperation among them strengthened. Regular channels should be established through which different groups can communicate their needs and expectations, and the establishment of new peace initiatives should be encouraged.

b) **Safe spaces where young people can express themselves freely should be created.** Physical and digital spaces should be legally protected to enable young people to discuss peace, justice and democratisation without fear of being prosecuted. Workshops facilitated by peers should be organised in these spaces, allowing young people to discuss issues of peace, justice and democratisation. The legal status of local councils should

be strengthened and they should assume responsibility for ensuring the sustainability of these spaces.

3. GENDER

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) and Decision-Makers

a) **Gender-sensitive policies and practices should be developed.** An independent Gender Equality Commission should be established to assess all legislation and policies from a gender perspective. The United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security should serve as a guiding framework in negotiation and legislative processes. Specific action plans should be developed to ensure that women and LGBTI+ people, who bear the particular burdens of conflict and displacement, have access to land, property, housing and socioeconomic resources. The specific needs of women who lay down their arms should be taken into account in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes. The number of safe spaces and women's shelters supporting women in breaking the cycle of violence should be increased.

b) **Transformative justice mechanisms addressing the gendered consequences of conflict should be established.** The differentiated impacts of conflict on various social groups and power relations should be reflected in the design of justice mechanisms. Experiences of women's tribunals established in

response to gender-based violence should be examined, and a model adapted to the specific circumstances of the Kurdish issue should be developed. Forced displacement and migration during more than a century of war and conflict, as well as the human rights violations and challenges women have faced in the places to which they have migrated, must be taken into account. To this end, support and monitoring mechanisms should be established jointly by women's rights organisations and public institutions.

c) **Gender equality** should be recognised as a fundamental pillar of social peace. Lasting peace cannot be built in an environment dominated by hate speech, repression and the criminalisation of LGBTI+ people's existence, freedom of expression and freedom of association. Peace is possible only within a social order in which everyone can live without fear and without facing discrimination on the grounds of their identity, gender or sexual orientation.

4. STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE, DEVELOPMENT, AND EMPLOYMENT

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), Decision-Makers, and Local Authorities

a) **Policies aiming to eliminate structural violence and inequalities must be placed at the core of peacebuilding.** Socioeconomic, cultural, and regional inequalities that cause or deepen conflict must be eradicated; equality must be ensured in access to education, healthcare, employment, culture, and

public life. A designated portion of regional development funds should be allocated as grants to women›s cooperatives, women farmers, and local subsistence production networks. Conditions must be established to enable the local population to engage in production within their own regions, and to allow young people to move freely according to their preferences without being forced to leave their places of residence.

Recommendations for Local Authorities, Producers, and Trade Unions

b) **Steps must be taken to develop a fair development model in conflict-affected regions where the local population acts as the primary subject.** Concrete policies regarding access to education and healthcare services, alongside urban reconstruction, must be implemented; in addition to individual compensation, livelihoods must also be restored. Economic development, resource sharing, and production processes must be planned in the public interest and with the direct participation of the people, without turning into areas of rent-seeking for corporations or individuals. Participatory production areas and cooperatives should be established, and a model that ensures the local population receives a fair share from every stage of production must be developed. To alleviate the unpaid care burden of women who have moved to metropolitan areas or district centers due to forced or economic migration, free daycares and elderly care centers providing services in the mother tongue must be opened in every neighborhood.

5. LAW AND CONSTITUTION-BASED DEMANDS

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) and the Ministry of Justice

a) **The principle of equal citizenship and the prohibition of discrimination must be reinforced at the constitutional level.** For a lasting peace, an order must be established where different identities are recognized and everyone enjoys equal access to rights. Effective legal safeguards must be provided against discrimination based on ethnic identity, language, gender, and other grounds; gender equality must be granted constitutional protection.

b) **Linguistic rights and the right to education in the mother tongue must be guaranteed.** Legal and de facto obstacles hindering the public use of languages spoken in Türkiye must be removed. Access to public information and services, including the Constitution and fundamental legal texts, must be provided in different languages; multilingualism should be expanded in the announcements of public institutions, as well as on signs and signboards in public spaces.

c) **The right to life must be protected, and impunity must be combated.** To effectively protect the right to life, security-oriented legislation must be restructured in favor of fundamental rights and freedoms. Provisions regulating the law enforcement›s authority to use weapons and force in a broad and ambiguous

manner must be aligned with international human rights standards; the principles of absolute necessity, proportionality, and last resort in the use of lethal force must be transformed into clear and binding legal guarantees. Violations of the right to life must be investigated independently and effectively; permanent search and seizure warrants must be bound by specific durations and conditions, subjected to continuous judicial review, and the nature of these warrants that breeds impunity must be brought to an end. Case file restrictions (confidentiality orders) and the transfer of trials to other provinces must not prevent the relatives of victims from accessing information and participating in the proceedings.

d) **The rights to freedom of expression, association, and political participation must be guaranteed.** Legislation restricting these rights must be amended; charges such as "organization propaganda" (terrorist propaganda) and "membership in an organization" must be prevented from being used to penalize the expression of thoughts, journalism, academic studies, and democratic organizing. Restrictions on peaceful assembly and demonstration must be lifted; decisions on bans and interventions must be aligned with the judgments of the Constitutional Court (AYM) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Academic freedom must be granted legal and constitutional guarantees.

e) **The right to vote, stand for election, and democratic representation must be protected.** The practice of appointing

trustees (government-appointed proxies), which eliminates the will of the voters and local representation, must be terminated; the dismissal of elected executives must be subject to effective judicial review. Reservations placed on the European Charter of Local Self-Government must be reviewed; the administrative and financial autonomy of local authorities must be strengthened.

f) **The consequences of political trials must be remedied, and participation in social life must be ensured.** Individuals prosecuted due to their expression, association, and political activities must be released; criminal records and losses of rights stemming from these trials must be expunged. The regulations to be introduced must ensure the reintegration of individuals into social and political life; however, crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations must not be covered by amnesty or impunity.

g) **International human rights standards must be implemented.** Judgments of the Constitutional Court (AYM) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) must be executed fully and without delay; Türkiye's reservations to human rights conventions must be lifted, and the country must become a party to the UN International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. UN and Council of Europe principles regulating the victims' right to remedy/reparation for gross human rights violations and the fight against impunity must be incorporated into domestic law, and their implementation must be regularly monitored. Human rights

training must be continuously provided to public personnel and security forces; independent oversight mechanisms to monitor violations on the ground must be strengthened.

6. EDUCATION

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) and the Ministry of National Education

a) **The education curriculum should be revised in line with a pluralistic, inclusive and rights-based approach.** The histories, cultures and heritage of Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Syriacs, Kurds and other peoples should be included in the curriculum. Militaristic, sexist, nationalist and discriminatory language in textbooks should be revised.

b) **Mother-tongue education and the protection of cultural heritage should be guaranteed.** Opportunities for mother-tongue education should be developed starting at the pre-school level, and minority schools should receive administrative, financial and legal support. Teaching materials and teacher training programmes that reflect linguistic diversity should be developed. Public policies should be established to protect and promote the languages spoken and cultural traditions practised in Türkiye, and to ensure their transmission across generations.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations, Educators and Researchers

c) **Research should be conducted, and alternative educational materials and programmes developed, with the direct participation of civil society, different academic disciplines and the communities concerned.** Workshops promoting inclusive language and rights-based ways of living should become part of the curriculum. Regular dialogue mechanisms should be established among different social groups to inform the development of education and cultural policies.

d) **Assimilation and practices of violence in education should be addressed.** A Türkiye-specific framework should be developed to address violations in institutions such as Regional Boarding Primary Schools (YİBOs), where children have been subjected to practices of assimilation and violence.

7. URBAN POLICIES

Recommendations for Local Governments

a) **Habitats and ecosystems damaged during the conflict and under the states of emergency should be restored.** The property and ownership rights of local residents should be protected in the reconstruction of homes and living spaces, and the right to housing must be guaranteed. Efforts should be initiated to restore damaged forest areas and ecosystems.

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) and the Ministry of Interior

b) **Urban spaces should be freed from security-oriented policies.** Police stations, fortified police outposts (kalekol), police checkpoints, armoured vehicles, heavy weapons and special operations units that negatively affect urban life and collective psychological well-being should be gradually withdrawn. Urban security should be brought into line with national and international civilian security standards. Vacated spaces should be transformed into parks, cultural centres and women's solidarity centres.

8. ECOLOGY

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) and Local Governments

a) **Ecology should become a fundamental component of the peace process.** The impacts of development and employment projects on ecosystems, local livelihoods and the habitats of all living beings should be assessed together. Drawing inspiration from the increasingly prominent approaches of green transitional justice and peace ecology, decisions should be guided by the principles of environmental law, the views of local communities and independent scientific assessments. Ecological organisations, professional associations and local communities should be ensured participation in decision-making and access to information.

b) **The environmental protection responsibilities of public institutions and local governments should be strengthened.** Safeguards for olive groves, pastures, coastlines, forests and other protected areas should be enhanced, and effective monitoring and sanctions should be applied against polluters. Local governments should receive the necessary capacity-building support. Effective avenues for challenging environmental decisions should be established, and the implementation of decisions should be guaranteed.

c) **Return to Village and Rehabilitation projects should be accompanied by ecological restoration.** Households returning to their villages should receive support for soil and water rehabilitation, soil improvement, tree seedlings for reforestation, and the restoration of irrigation infrastructure.

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), Decision-Makers and the Ministry of Justice

a) **Legislative reforms should be introduced to strengthen environmental law.** The Aarhus Convention[1] should be signed and incorporated into domestic law. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures weakened through legislative amendments, as well as regulations that contravene environmental law, should be reviewed. Binding legislation based

[1] The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (**the Aarhus Convention**), which entered into force in 2001, is an international agreement that upholds the public's environmental rights and promotes transparency in governance.

on the precautionary principle should be enacted. The costs of public-interest litigation brought to protect the environment should be covered by the state. Dam and hydropower plant (HPP) projects carried out on security grounds, forest burning and mining exploration licences should be halted.

d) **Ecological damage caused by the conflict should be identified and remedied.** A Local Compensation Commission should be established to independently document ecological damage, including polluted water resources, destroyed forests and pastures, dams constructed on security grounds, and villages evacuated during the conflict. The Commission should receive applications and oversee processes of compensation, reckoning with the harm inflicted on nature, and planning ecological restoration.

9. YOUTH

Recommendations for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) and Decision-Makers

a) **An independent Youth Advisory Council should be established to ensure the direct participation of young people in the peace process.** Operating within the TBMM or relevant decision-making bodies, the Council should have a transparent structure that brings together young people from diverse ethnic, class, cultural and geographical backgrounds through a combination of sortition and representative selection. Mechanisms should be

put in place to ensure that young people's demands and concerns are directly reflected in legal and political processes.

Recommendations for Local Governments and Civil Society Organisations

b) **Youth organisations and civic participation networks should be supported.** Grant programmes with reduced bureaucratic requirements should be established for grassroots youth groups, university clubs and informal initiatives. This would enable young people who are not members of any association or political party to participate in local peacebuilding and dialogue initiatives.

c) **Young people should be involved in local budgeting processes.** Participatory budgeting models should be implemented to enable young people to express their views and vote when youth policies and budgets are determined in cities.

d) **Free Social Peace and Youth Centres should be established.** These centres should bring together young people from different cultural backgrounds and combat discrimination at the local level, making visible how peace can improve everyday life and strengthen social justice. The experience and expertise of civil society organisations and relevant professional groups should be drawn upon in shaping these centres.

YOUTH FOR PEACE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE AND LASTING PEACE

CONCLUSION

MAKING PEACE A PART OF SOCIAL LIFE

Lasting peace must be built on the foundations of justice, equal citizenship, gender equality, mother-tongue rights, ecological protection and confronting the past. For the peace process to take root in society, a transparent and inclusive communication strategy should be developed to ensure that its objectives, scope and stages are communicated to the public in a timely, verifiable and accessible manner. This strategy should create channels through which different segments of society can express their concerns, expectations and objections, and recognise young people not merely as recipients of information but as actors who help shape the language of communication around the process.

Public service announcements, documentaries, podcasts and digital content that go beyond statements by political actors and make visible the experiences of women, young people, those directly affected by the conflict and local actors should be supported in Turkish and Kurdish, among other languages. These materials should present peace not merely as the end of conflict, but also in terms of equality, justice, access to rights, a secure future and peaceful coexistence. Hate speech, discriminatory language and disinformation should be monitored by an independent **Peace Communication Monitoring Board**. Its findings should be made public, and principles for rights-based, conflict-sensitive journalism should be developed.

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