



By: TA | AP Brief

Kurdish fighters in Iraq to hand over weapons



A Kurdish militant group that has waged a long-running insurgency in Turkey announced its fighters in northern Iraq will begin handing over their weapons, marking the first concrete step toward disarmament as part of a peace process.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or **PKK**, announced in May it would **disband** and renounce armed conflict, ending four decades of hostilities.

The move came after PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who has been imprisoned on an island near Istanbul since 1999, **urged** his group in February to convene a congress and formally disband and disarm.

Öcalan, 76, continues to wield significant influence in the Kurdish movement despite his 25-year imprisonment. His call to end the fighting marked a pivotal step toward ending the decades-long conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives since the 1980s.

In the latest development, "a group of guerrilla fighters will come down from the mountains and will bid farewell to their arms in an effort to declare their good will for peace and democratic politics," the PKK said in a statement Thursday.

The ceremony is expected to take place between July 10 and July 12

The ceremony, which is expected to take place between July 10 and July 12 in the city of Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, will be the first concrete move toward disarmament.

Zagros Hiwa, a PKK spokesperson, said the fighters will destroy their weapons "under the supervision of civil society institutions and interested parties."

The number of fighters who will take part has not yet been determined but might be between 20 and 30, he said.

For the PKK to take further steps toward

disarmament, he said "the regime of isolation" imposed on Öcalan in prison has to be abolished and constitutional, legal and political must be taken to "ensure that the guerrilla who have abandoned the strategy of armed struggle could be reintegrated into democratic politics in Turkey."

Symbolic destruction of some light weapons

An Iraqi Kurdish official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly, said that an agreement was reached to carry out a "symbolic destruction of some light weapons, in order to reassure the Turks," in the presence of representatives from the Kurdistan Regional Government.

The regional government is dominated by two parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, with the KDP overseeing the regional capital, Erbil, and the city of Dohuk. The PUK governs Sulaymaniyah.

The KDP has good relations with Turkey and has been at odds with the PKK, while the PUK is closer to the PKK.

The PKK could begin handing over arms within days

In Turkey on Monday, Omer Celik, a spokesperson for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, or AKP, said the PKK could begin handing over arms "within days," but did not provide details. Celik added that Erdogan would meet with members of the pro-Kurdish party next week to discuss the peace effort.

There was no immediate statement from Turkey's government on Thursday's announcement.

The PKK has long maintained bases in the mountains of northern Iraq. Turkish forces have launched offensives and airstrikes against

the PKK in Iraq and have set up bases in the area. Scores of villages have **emptied** as a result.

The Iraqi government in Baghdad last year **announced** an official ban on the separatist group, which has long been prohibited in Turkey.