June 8, 1999

The Turkish government and media have stirred up nationalistic passions against Mr. Ocalan. If the Turkish government succeeds in extraditing Mr. Ocalan and the threat to hang him is carried out, the result would be disastrous for all the people of the region. Yet interestingly enough, the trial of Mr. Ocalan has created a potentially positive and long overdue opening towards reconciliation between the Turkish and Kurdish peoples.

Standing in the dock at his show trial, Mr. Ocalan made a brave plea for a negotiated, Democratic solution to the Kurdish question. Mr. Ocalan's organization, the Kurdish workers's party known as the PKK, has announced its support for Mr. Ocalan's peace offer. While the media attention that the trial is attracting, putting the Kurdish issue in the spotlight to an almost unprecedented degree, Turkey could vastly improve its international standing by simply agreeing to begin negotiations with the Kurdish leaders. But, sadly, Mr. Speaker, so far the Turkish government has rejected the path to peace insisting that it will not negotiate with Mr. Ocalan or any leaders of the Kurdish movement.

Yesterday's Washington Post had an editorial entitled, "Turkey's Kurdish Opening," which begins with these words: "Turkey may have a once in a generation opening to treat its national cancer, the problem of its aggrieved Turkish minority." The editorial in the Post, a paper that has previously shown sympathy to the Turkish people's point of view on a number of issues, notes that the Turkish policy of relentless military and political attack on the Kurdish movement dooms Turkey to a conflict that sets it at odds with the human Democratic values of the western nations whose company it most values.

That is the point of order, Mr. Speaker, that Turkey has put itself into. Turkey is a member of NATO and has sought membership in the European Union, so far unsuccessfully. At the same time, Turkey continues not only to wage a dirty war against a minority community within its borders but to repress and essentially deny the existence of a distinct Kurdish identity, language or culture.

In the meantime, Turkey's economic development, levels of education, infrastructure, development and standard of living, lag far behind European standards while scarce resources are squandered on its ongoing war against the Kurds. It is a cycle that must be broken.

As The Washington Post editorial concludes, "Friends of Turkey must hope it can muster the courage to broaden its perspective and to conduct an honest exploration of the Ocalan initiative."

Mr. Speaker, two recent articles in the New York Times suggest unfortu-

nately that the Turkish political and military establishment is a long way from making this major leap. Last Friday's Reader's Digest, the Turkey's best known human rights advocate, Akin Birdal, entered prison to serve a 9½ month sentence for giving speeches judged subversive.

What was his subversive activity? Mr. Birdal, chairman of the Human Rights Association, has repeatedly urged the Turkish state to reach a peaceful settlement with Kurdish rebels. Now, as the article reports, such statements constitute support for terrorism under Turkish law. This same law has recently been used to convict two journalists, a university professor and an aide to Mr. Birdal. While some brave Turks, including the country's top judge, have called for repeal of the law, the hardline regime refuses to give in.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to encourage the U.S. Government to take constructive role in the thing off the crisis in Turkey, my colleague, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and I, are circulating a letter this week asking our colleagues to sign a letter to President Clinton urging his intervention to implore that the Turkish authorities show some basic fairness in treating Mr. Ocalan and to spare his life. Seeking a fair trial for Mr. Ocalan should be the first step in our efforts to press Turkey to enter into negotiations to achieve a political solution to this tragic struggle.

Mr. Ocalan and his Kurdish organization have offered an olive branch to the Turkish government. It would be both the decent and the smart thing to do for Turkey to accept this good faith offer and to embark on the path of peace.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ocalan made several previous cease-fire offers prior to his arrest—all of which were summarily rejected by the Turkish government and military officials.

An article in Sunday's New York Times further describes the hardening of official attitudes in Turkey. According to the article, the Turkish Interior Ministry has issued a directive to all police and military officials reminding them of their legal duties to deal with the PKK. The article makes the point that Turkey is moving towards a situation in which it would be too late to pursue a negotiated, Democratic solution to the Kurdish question.

Mr. Speaker, the Turkish regime refuses to even acknowledge the Kurds' existence, referring to them as "mountain Turks," prohibiting all expression of Kurdish culture and language in an effort to forcibly assimilate them, while jailing oppositional Kurdish leaders. The Government of Turkey's undeclared war on the Kurds has claimed close to 40,000 lives and caused more than 3 million people to become refugees.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. There being no further requests for morning hour debates, pursuant to clause 12, rule 1, the House will stand in recess until 10 a.m.

Accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 11 minutes a.m.) the House stood in recess until 10 a.m.

AFTER RECESS

The House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. SHAW) at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

The Reverend Dr. Peter M. Kurowski, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, California, Missouri, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray, Lord God, enlighten us to see that unless You build the house, in vain do our guardians watch. Open our eyes to see Your awesome fingerprints in creation, Your amazing footprints in the realm of redemption, and Your architectural imprints upon the documents which helped to give birth to this Republic. May these revelations move citizens everywhere to walk humbly, do justice, and show compassion. Inspire a desire in Americans everywhere to absorb the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes so that as a nation we do not repeat the melancholy moments in history. We ask this in the name of the Wisdom of the ages, the Saviour of sinners, Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHAW), The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1, rule I, I demand a vote on agreeing to the Chair's approval of the Journal.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the Chair's approval of the Journal.

The question was taken; and the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.