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Press Release

SNP on Leyla Zana speech to European Parliament

SNP Euro-MPs have described today's address to the European Parliament by Kurdish human rights activist Leyla Zana as an inspiring example of one person's struggle for peace in the face of tremendous adversity. Leyla Zana was awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought in 1995 in recognition of her peaceful struggle for the rights of the Kurdish people.

But Mrs Zana has been unable to collect the award in person until today. The first Kurdish woman elected to the Turkish parliament, she spent ten years in prison for saying in Kurdish when taking the parliamentary oath that she would struggle so that Kurds and Turks can live together in democratic freedom. She was released in June this year.

SNP European Leader Ian Hudghton MEP said:

"We have been campaigning for Leyla Zana's release from prison for the past ten years and we're delighted that she's finally been able to collect this award. Today she spoke of her hope that Kurds and Turks would be able to live together in peace and democracy and we share that sentiment.

She called also on the Turkish government to join in sincere dialogue with the Kurdish people to find a peaceful solution to the conflicts. We remain of the opinion that the Turkish government must make real progress to fulfil the political, cultural and social aspirations of the Kurdish people before progress can be made on its application to join the EU."

Alyn Smith MEP added:

"Leyla Zana is an inspiring example of one person's struggle for peace in the face of tremendous adversity. She is an utterly selfless politician who seeks nothing in return for her many sacrifices in the name of peace and democracy. In her address to parliament she called on us to recognise the political, social and cultural democratic rights of the Kurds who number 40 million people.

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ALYN SMITH MEP

FIGHTING FOR AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND IN EUROPE

Surely, the greatest tribute to the selfless sacrifice of Mrs Zana and others would be the eventual accession to the EU of a Turkish state that fully recognises and respects the rights of all of the peoples that live within its borders."

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