



international declaration to free arnaldo otegi & to bring Basque political prisoners home

Five years ago the Basque independence movement began an unprecedented and far reaching debate. That debate concluded with an unequivocal commitment to an exclusively peaceful and democratic pursuit of self-determination for the Basque Country. The movement renounced the use of violence and committed to the goal of ending the long and violent conflict by means of dialogue.

In October of 2011, ETA responded to a call from the *Aiete International Peace Conference* by declaring a definitive end to its 50 years of armed activity, and opening a process of dialogue. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Desmond Tutu called Arnaldo Otegi, ex spokesperson of Batasuna and now Secretary General of the political party Sortu, "*the leader of the peace process*". Otegi was the prime mover pressing the independence movement to embrace argument and the power of word as the only means to resolve all conflict.

Unfortunately the Spanish government responded to Otegi's efforts by arresting him in October 2009. He was sentenced to six and a half years in prison for membership of the political party, Batasuna, which had been banned by the Spanish government. Since then, despite the end of ETA's armed activity - including their demonstrated commitment to disarmament, dialogue and reconciliation, including recognition of the suffering of all victims - there is still an absence of any positive response from the Spanish State.

Arnaldo Otegi, whose case has been raised to the European Court of Human Rights, is being held in a Spanish prison far away from his family and friends. The same are the cases of some 500 other Basque prisoners related to this conflict.

They are deliberately dispersed, often in solitary confinement, and all are in prisons long distances from the Basque Country. A reality that brings and added punishment to their families, doomed to travel long distances to visit their loved ones.

We, therefore, call for the immediate release of Arnaldo Otegi, a man who took risks for peace and democracy and who tirelessly persuaded many others to believe in the power of word alone as the mean of resolving this conflict. His release and the end of the dispersal policy, prior to an agreed early release process, are necessary steps to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region.

For humanity. For justice. Because we believe in a solution without winners and losers. Because we believe in peace.

Because of all this, we ask to Free of Arnaldo Otegi and to bring Basque Political prisoners home to the Basque Country.