

HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S DAY IN TURKEY

In Turkey, Children's Day has been celebrated on April 23 since 1935. It originated from the first gathering of Turkish Grand National Assembly on April 23, 1920, during the Turkish Independence War.



After the Ottomans were defeated during World War I, Turkish land had been occupied by other European countries such as England, Greece and France. Atatürk, an Ottoman commander, broke his ties with the dying Empire and started the war for independence against Allied forces and the old Ottoman regime. After years of fighting Turkey won full independence.

Turks consider Atatürk to be "The Father of Modern Turkey". After the war, Atatürk refused the role of Sultan or King and established a modern Republic instead. He gifted April 23 to the children for the country, so that they would cherish the independence that cost so much, but at the same time walk the path of

"Peace at Home, Peace in the World"



On April 23 children from around the world come to Turkey. They are hosted by families who have children of a similar age. Festivities last over a week and the visiting and Turkish children spend a lot of time together. Many children, often not even speaking the same language, create lifelong friendships. Several of the events are broadcast on television, showing the children in their traditional national outfits, dancing singing and exchanging gifts. The United Nations participates the events.

Every year on April 23, the seats of Parliament are held by children, and a child becomes President for a day. The child President delivers a speech on national television.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S DAY IN TURKEY

This national day (23rd April National Sovereignty and Children's Day) in Turkey is a unique event. The founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, dedicated April 23 to the children of the country to emphasize that they are the future of the new nation. It was on April 23, 1920, during the War of Independence, that the Grand National Assembly met in Ankara and laid down the foundations of a new, independent, secular, and modern republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. Following the defeat of the Allied invasion forces on September 9, 1922 and the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne on July 24, 1923, Atatürk started his task of establishing the institutions of the new state. Over the next eight years, Atatürk and his followers adopted sweeping reforms to create a modern Turkey, divorced from her Ottoman past. In unprecedented moves, he dedicated the sovereignty day to the children and entrusted in the hands of the youth the protection of this sovereignty and independence.



Every year, the children in Turkey celebrate this "Sovereignty and Children's Day" as a national holiday. Schools participate in week-long ceremonies marked by performances in all fields in large stadiums watched by the entire nation. Among the activities on this day, the children send their representatives to replace state officials and high ranking bureaucrats in their offices. The President, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Ministers, provincial governors all turn over their positions to children's representatives. These children, in turn, sign

executive orders relating to educational and environmental policies. On this day, the children also replace the parliamentarians in the Grand National Assembly and hold a special session to discuss matters concerning children's issues.

Over the last two decades, the Turkish officials have been working hard to internationalize this important day. Their efforts resulted in large number of world states' sending groups of children to Turkey to participate in the above stated festivities. During their stay in Turkey, the foreign children are housed in Turkish homes and find an important opportunity to interact with the Turkish kids and learn about each other's countries and cultures. The foreign children groups also participate in the special session of the Grand National Assembly. This results in a truly international Assembly where children pledge their commitment to international peace and brotherhood.



The importance of April 23 as a special day of children has been recognized by the international community. UNICEF decided to recognize this important day as the International Children's Day.

"SOVEREIGNTY BELONGS UNCONDITIONALLY TO THE PEOPLE"
M. KEMAL ATATÜRK