

National Sovereignty and Children's Day in TURKEY

Solemn ceremonies and children's festivals take place throughout Turkey on National Sovereignty and Children's Day, held on April 23 each year. The 23rd April Children's Festival is a children's festival which was dedicated to Turkish children by Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK, founder of the Republic of Turkey, to mark the opening of the Assembly. The festival has been celebrated internationally since 1979. The Children's Festival was first celebrated in Turkey on 23 April 1920, when the Turkish Grand National Assembly was opened. The Festival intends to contribute creation of a world where children can live peacefully by developing sentiments of fraternity, love and friendship.

Many people in Turkey commemorate the first gathering of the Grand National Assembly (the Turkish Parliament), which took place on April 23, 1920, by attending local ceremonies or laying wreaths at monuments of Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK, the founder of the Turkish Republic. The biggest ceremony takes place at the Atatürk Mausoleum in Ankara.

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. Because Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK reportedly dedicated the Turkish Republic to children, among the activities on this day the children send their representatives to replace state officials and high ranking civil servants 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. The state-run Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) brings children, aged eight to 14, from different countries around the world to Turkey. 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 children 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.