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Turkey: Harassment of several individuals and groups as a reprisal for their calls for peace and the respect of human rights in the context of the "Operation Peace Spring"

URGENT APPEAL - THE OBSERVATORY

TUR 003 / 1019 / OBS 088
 Threats / Police intervention/
 Judicial harassment / Risk of arrest
Turkey
 October 25, 2019

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), requests your intervention in the following situation in **Turkey**.

Description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about the harassment of several individuals and groups as a reprisal for their calls for peace and the respect of human rights in the context of the "Operation Peace Spring", Turkey's military offensive in northern Syria that started on October 9, 2019.

According to the information received these acts include in particular: the raid of the house of Ms. **Nurcan Baysal**, a journalist and 2018 Global Laureate for Human Rights Defenders at Risk by Front Line Defenders; the police intervention at the Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği* - İHD)

offices in Istanbul; threats and judicial harassment against Ms. **Eren Keskin**^[1], a human rights lawyer and co-President of İHD; the judicial harassment of Mr. **Sezgin Tanrikulu**, a human rights lawyer and Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* - CHP) deputy, Ms. **Pervin Buldan** and Mr. **Sezai Temelli**, co-chairs of the People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* - HDP), Ms. **Gülüstan Kılıç Koçyiğit** and **Leyla Güven** and Mr. **Berdan Öztürk**, three HDP deputies.

On October 19, 2019, at 5 a.m., 30 to 40 police officers raided Ms. Nurcan Baysal's house in Diyarbakir to arrest her in relation to an investigation into her social media posts criticising "Operation Peace Spring". Ms. Nurcan Baysal was not arrested as she was abroad on that date but her two children witnessed the police raid. The Observatory fears that Ms. Nurcan Baysal may be detained upon her return to Turkey beginning of December.

On October 12, 2019, the police attacked a sit-in action in front of İHD offices in Istanbul. At the time, the Saturday Mothers^[2] were holding their weekly peaceful sit-in action in front of the İHD İstanbul office^[3]. As usual, they displayed photos of their family members who forcibly disappeared in the 90s. The Chair of İHD's İstanbul branch read the press statement demanding justice for those who were forcibly disappeared and denounced the ongoing Turkish military intervention in Syria. In response, the police dispersed the crowd using tear gas and truncheons.

On the same day, Ms. Eren Keskin was targeted by the journalist Nedim Şener after she published a tweet accusing him of being against Kurdish people. During a TV show, Nedim Şener presented her as "a lawyer close to PKK and HDP" and insulted her. Ms. Eren Keskin reported that, since then, she has been receiving threats. In addition, in the evening of October 22, 2019, the police went to her house, she was not at home at that moment and her mother, who was at home, was asked about her whereabouts. Afterwards, police called Ms. Eren Keskin. She was invited to the Anadolu Public Prosecutor Office and interrogated on October 23, 2019, for "terrorist propaganda" in relation to her social media posts (related to the military operation and other human rights issues). She was released following the interrogation and not taken into police custody.

Furthermore, the Observatory was informed of a series of acts of judicial harassment targeting other voices criticising the adverse human rights impacts of the Turkish military offensive in Syria. On October 12, 2019, a criminal investigation was launched against Mr. Sezgin Tanrikulu with charges of "insulting the Government of Turkey" for his tweet stating that "the Government should know that this is an unjust war and a war against Kurdish people". He was also charged for his media interviews on the military offensive in Syria.

Additionally, on October 10, 2019, Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched a criminal investigation against Ms. Pervin Buldan and Mr. Sezai Temelli, co-chairs of HDP, over charges of "terrorist propaganda" and "insulting the Government of Turkey" for a written statement criticising the "Operation Peace Spring" published on October 9, 2019^[4].

Another investigation was launched against MPs Gülüstan Kılıç Koçyiğit, Leyla Güven and Berdan Öztürk as well as the co-chairs of HDP on the grounds of "terrorist propaganda", "praising crime and criminals" and "insulting the Government of Turkey" for a joint press statement on the military offensive made on October 9, at the HDP head office.

The Observatory highlights that these acts of harassment followed a press release published on October 10, 2019 by the Public prosecutor prohibiting any criticism of "Operation Peace Spring". Afterwards the police, prosecutors and judges started to implement the prohibition of any criticism of

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the military intervention. Furthermore, since the launch of the military offensive, pro-government journalists have regularly threatened and insulted all those calling for peace, respect for human rights and an end to the military offensive.

The Observatory expresses its utmost concern over the raid of Ms. Nurcan Baysal' house, the use of excessive force in front of İHD offices, threats against Ms. Eren Keskin, police intervention at her house and her judicial harassment, as well as the judicial harassment of Sezgin Tanrikulu, Sezai Temelli, Berdan Öztürk, Gülüstan Kılıç Koçyiğit, Pervin Buldan and Leyla Güven, which is only aimed at intimidating and silencing the activists.

The Observatory calls on the Turkish authorities to immediately end any act of harassment, including at the judicial level, against Sezgin Tanrikulu, Sezai Temelli, Berdan Öztürk and Ms. Gülüstan Kılıç Koçyiğit, Pervin Buldan, Leyla Güven, Nurcan Baysal and Eren Keskin, all İHD members as well as all human rights defenders in Turkey.

Actions requested:

Please write to the authorities of Turkey asking them to:

- i. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Sezgin Tanrikulu, Sezai Temelli, Berdan Öztürk, Ms. Gülüstan Kılıç Koçyiğit, Pervin Buldan, Leyla Güven, Nurcan Baysal and Eren Keskin, İHD members and all human rights defenders in Turkey;
- ii. Put an end to all forms of harassment, including at the judicial level, against. Sezgin Tanrikulu, Sezai Temelli, Gülüstan Kılıç Koçyiğit, Berdan Öztürk and Pervin Buldan, Leyla Güven, Nurcan Baysal and Eren Keskin, İHD members and all human rights defenders in Turkey;
- iii. Comply with all the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998, in particular its Articles 1 and 12.2;
- iv. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Constitution of the Turkish Republic, international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Turkey.

Addresses:

- President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Fax: (+90 312) 525 58 31
- Minister of Justice, Mr. Abdülhamit Gül, E-mail: ozelkalem@adalet.gov.tr
- Minister of Interior, Mr. Süleyman Soylu, Fax: +90 (312) 425 61 30
- H.E. Mr. Kaymakci Faruk, Ambassador, Diplomatic Mission of Turkey to the European Union in Brussels, Belgium, E-mail: tr-delegation.eu@mfa.gov.tr; Fax: + 32 2 511 04 50
- H.E. Mr. Sadık Arslan, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, E-mail: turkey.unog@mfa.gov.tr; Fax: +41 22 734 08 59

Please also write to the diplomatic missions or embassies of Turkey in your respective country.

Paris-Geneva, October 25, 2019

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://www.protectdefenders.eu), the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

- E-mail: Appeals@fidh-omct.org
- Tel and fax FIDH + 33 1 43 55 25 18 / +33 1 43 55 18 80
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[1]

For the past thirty years, Ms. Eren Keskin has contributed to the protection of minority rights, countered violence against women, and campaigned to challenge militarism and end torture. She is the founder of a legal office providing *pro bono* services for transgender persons and women who were raped or sexually abused by the national security forces. From 2013 to 2016, Ms. Eren Keskin held the title of 'co-editor-in-chief' for *Özgür Gündem* ('Free Agenda'), as a form of support of the imprisoned editorial staff. See Observatory Urgent Appeal TUR 003 / 0618 / OBS 087.2, published on May 28, 2019.

[2]

The Saturday Mothers (*Curmatesi Anneleri*) is a group of mothers who gather every Saturday at noon for half an hour in Istanbul's Galatasaray Square holding photographs of their loved ones, victims of enforced disappearance or political murders in the 1980's and 1990's.

[3]

Since August 25, 2018, their 700th week of protest, the Saturday Mothers were banned from holding their weekly gathering in Istanbul's Galatasaray Square.

[4]

In their statement "Let's give a voice to Rojava against the war", they condemned the operation and said, "Against this unlawful and illegitimate war, we will side with life without the slightest hesitation together with our people and Turkey's democratic forces".

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