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Human Rights Watch Submission to the Human Rights Committee on Türkiye
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Submission by Human Rights Watch on Türkiye to the Human Rights Committee

This submission aims to contribute to the Human Rights Committee's ("the Committee") upcoming review of Türkiye's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("ICCPR" or "the Covenant").

It focuses on the following key areas of concern – (1) Attacks on freedom of expression, assembly and association through arbitrary restrictions on liberty and abusive criminal proceedings reliant on unforeseeable counterterrorism legislation and criminal defamation laws; 2) Restrictions on social media and online content limiting the right to freedom of expression and to receive and impart information; 3) Rising incidence of torture and ill-treatment, and impunity for enforced disappearances and abductions; 4) Violence against women and domestic violence; 5) Abuses against migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; and 6) Violations in Turkish-occupied areas of northern Syria, including arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, seizure of property, looting, and lack of redress.

Introduction

The topics addressed in this submission do not provide a comprehensive account of the myriad ways in which the Turkish government's policies and practices fall short of Covenant standards. Nor are they a full reflection of the scope of Human Rights Watch's work on Türkiye. A fuller overview of Human Rights Watch's concerns on Türkiye is available at: [Türkiye | Country Page | World | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](https://www.hrw.org/country/turkey)

In the 12 years since the Committee last examined Türkiye, the country's human rights record has declined greatly and there has been a major erosion of the rule of law.

The most significant structural change to Türkiye's system of governance came in 2017 with constitutional amendments passed by parliament and popular referendum under a state of emergency following the July 15, 2016 military coup attempt. The amendments introduced a new political system which fundamentally undermined checks on executive power, hollowed out democratic institutions and concentrated

excessive power over the judiciary in the hands of the president.¹ The Venice Commission issued an opinion on the constitutional amendments warning of the lack of checks “to safeguard against [the presidential regime] becoming an authoritarian one,” and raising concerns that the president's dual role as president and as a dominant force in parliamentary party politics would allow him to control appointments to the Council of Judges and Prosecutors both from the presidency and from parliament and thus “would place the independence of the judiciary in serious jeopardy.”² The subsequent pattern of judicial decisions which repeatedly defy the binding caselaw of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and of Türkiye's Constitutional Court amply demonstrate the validity of the concerns raised by the Venice Commission.

(1) Attacks on freedom of expression, assembly and association through arbitrary restrictions on liberty and abusive criminal proceedings (Covenant articles 2,4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22)

Domestic judicial practice in recent years shows that the attacks on human rights defenders and other perceived government critics and opponents have only increased. The government and courts have increasingly attributed violent intent to the legitimate exercise of rights protected under the Covenant and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and represented peaceful expression, assembly and association as criminal offenses, with the ulterior purpose of silencing or dissuading human rights defenders,³ civil society, Kurdish opposition politicians,⁴ the media,⁵

¹Human Rights Watch news release, “[Turkey: President Bids for One-Man Rule](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/18/turkey-president-bids-one-man-rule),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/18/turkey-president-bids-one-man-rule>, January 18, 2017; Human Rights Watch, “[Questions and Answers: Turkey's Constitutional Referendum](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/04/questions-and-answers-turkeys-constitutional-referendum),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/04/questions-and-answers-turkeys-constitutional-referendum>, April 4, 2017.

² Venice Commission, “Turkey: Opinion on the Amendments to the Constitution Adopted by the Grand National Assembly on 21 January 2017 and to be Submitted to a National Referendum on 16 April 2017,” CDL-AD(2017)005, March 13, 2017: see [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2017\)005-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2017)005-e)

³ Human Rights Watch news release, “[Turkey: Human Rights Defender on Trial](https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/21/turkey-human-rights-defender-trial),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/21/turkey-human-rights-defender-trial>, February 21, 2022.

⁴ Human Rights Watch report, “[Turkey: Crackdown on Kurdish Opposition](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/20/turkey-crackdown-kurdish-opposition),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/20/turkey-crackdown-kurdish-opposition>, March 20, 2017; Human Rights Watch news release, “Kurdish politicians convicted in unjust mass trial,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/Turkiye-kurdish-politicians-convicted-unjust-mass-trial>, May 16, 2024.

⁵ Human Rights Watch report, “[Silencing Turkey's Media: The Government's Deepening Assault on Critical Journalism](https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/15/silencing-turkeys-media/governments-deepening-assault-critical-journalism),” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/15/silencing-turkeys-media/governments-deepening-assault-critical-journalism>, December 15, 2016.

lawyers acting for perceived government critics,⁶ and other alternative or dissenting voices.

The prolonged arbitrary detention and abusive proceedings against rights defender Osman Kavala and others (in the process known as the Gezi Park trial), and opposition politicians Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ (currently in the process known as the Kobane trial), are the best known among thousands of other cases.⁷ As the European Parliament has highlighted, the Gezi Park trial of Kavala and others is “emblematic” of the “political instrumentalization of the judicial system” to repress freedoms of expression and of association.⁸

Despite ECtHR judgments ordering the release of Kavala, Demirtaş and Yüksekdağ, and infringement proceedings against Türkiye over the non-implementation of the Kavala decision, Türkiye continues to flagrantly defy the ECtHR. The Constitutional Court defied the ECtHR’s December 2019 Kavala judgment in its decision of December 2020, where it concluded that there was no violation of Osman Kavala’s rights, showing that in some cases the Constitutional Court has been implicated in the non-implementation of ECtHR decisions.

As international human rights groups, expert bodies and the ECtHR caselaw have repeatedly demonstrated, judicial authorities in Türkiye rely on an expansive interpretation of vaguely formulated national security legislation, combined with extremely weak or altogether non-existent evidence, to initiate proceedings against and detain perceived government critics on the basis of their legitimate activities.⁹ Widespread infringements of the basic tenets of legality and of the right to liberty and to a fair trial have given judicial authorities the ability to turn the law into a shackle on

⁶ Human Rights Watch report, “[Lawyers on Trial: Abusive Prosecutions and Erosion of Fair Trial Rights in Turkey](https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/10/lawyers-trial/abusive-prosecutions-and-erosion-fair-trial-rights-turkey),” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/10/lawyers-trial/abusive-prosecutions-and-erosion-fair-trial-rights-turkey>, April 10, 2019.

⁷ See Human Rights Watch news releases: “[Turkey: Top Court Upholds Rights Defender’s Life Term](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/10/turkey-top-court-upholds-rights-defenders-life-term),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/10/turkey-top-court-upholds-rights-defenders-life-term>, October 10, 2023; “[Türkiye: Kurdish Politicians Convicted in Unjust Mass Trial](https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/turkiye-kurdish-politicians-convicted-unjust-mass-trial),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/turkiye-kurdish-politicians-convicted-unjust-mass-trial>, May 16, 2024; “[Turkey: Release Politicians Wrongfully Detained for 7 Years](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/03/turkey-release-politicians-wrongfully-detained-7-years),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/03/turkey-release-politicians-wrongfully-detained-7-years>, November 3, 2023.

⁸ European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2023 on the 2022 Commission Report on Türkiye (2022/2205(INI)), para. 10 (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0320_EN.html).

⁹ 1377bis meeting (1-3 September 2020) (DH) - Rule 9.2 - Communication from NGOs (Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists and the Turkish Human Rights Litigation Project) (29/05/2020) in the case of Kavala v. Turkey (Application No. [28749/18](https://www.echr.coe.int/ViewDoc.aspx?id=1874918)) (Mergen and others group), DH-DD(2020)501, §§27-32; Venice Commission, Opinion on articles 216, 299, 301 and 314 of the Penal Code of Turkey, CDL AD(2016)002, 15 March 2016; Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, Report following her visit to Turkey from 1 to 5 July 2019, CommDH(2020)1, §32. See also European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments: *Işıkırık v Turkey*, App. no. [41226/09](https://www.echr.coe.int/ViewDoc.aspx?id=1874918), 14 November 2017; *İmret v Turkey* (no. 2), App no. [57316/10](https://www.echr.coe.int/ViewDoc.aspx?id=1874918), 10 July 2018; *Bakir and Others v. Turkey*, App no. [46713/10](https://www.echr.coe.int/ViewDoc.aspx?id=1874918), 10 July 2018.

public scrutiny of state policies, opening wide the door for state authorities to perpetrate human rights violations with impunity.

The recent ECtHR Grand Chamber judgment of *Yüksel Yalçinkaya v Türkiye* provides further evidence of the serious and systemic breaches of ECHR rights also protected under the Covenant by domestic judicial authorities in criminal proceedings relying on counterterrorism or national security laws.¹⁰ The Court found that the applicant's conviction for membership of a terrorist organization (Article 314 of the Turkish Criminal Code) based on his use of the ByLock encrypted messaging application and membership of a trade union alleged to be associated with the Gülen movement, which Türkiye deems a terrorist organization responsible for the 2016 military coup attempt, violated Article 6, Article 7, and Article 11 of the Convention. The ECtHR observed that judicial authorities' expansive and unforeseeable interpretation of the domestic law, departing from the legal requirements of intent and attaching objective liability to the use of ByLock, were systemic, reflected in the 8,000 applications in its docket concerning convictions based on the use of ByLock. However, no steps have been taken so far by Turkish authorities to implement this judgment and, completely ignoring the ECtHR judgment, on September 12, 2024 the Kayseri court hearing the retrial of Yüksel Yalçinkaya once again convicted him on the basis of the same evidence and charges to a six-year-three-month prison sentence.¹¹

The use of criminal defamation charges, including the charge of "insulting the president" (Turkish Penal Code article 299) to detain, prosecute and convict people for critical speech is pervasive.¹² ECtHR rulings calling for an amendment to the law on "insulting the president" to bring it into line with Article 10 of the ECHR, and deemed that Turkish Penal Code article 301 ("insulting the Turkish nation") did not meet the "quality of law" and was also incompatible with article 10. Neither decision has been implemented.¹³

Recommendations

The Committee should call on the Turkish government to ensure an end to the abuse of criminal proceedings and detention orders against human rights defenders, journalists, opposition politicians, Kurdish political activists, dismissed civil servants, judges and

¹⁰ ECtHR, *Yüksel Yalçinkaya v Türkiye* [GC], App no. [15669/20](#), Judgment of 26 September 2023.

¹¹ Independent Türkçe news website, "[Yerel mahkeme, Yalçinkaya davasında AIHM kararına uymadı: Aynı ceza verildi | Independent Türkçe \(indyturk.com\)](#)" ("Local court does not adhere to ECtHR judgment in Yalçinkaya trial: Gives same penalty"), September 12, 2024.

¹² See Human Rights Watch news release, "[Turkey: End Prosecutions For 'Insulting President'](#)," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/17/turkey-end-prosecutions-insulting-president>, October 17, 2018; Duvar English news website, "[Turkish prosecutors launch more than 7,500 cases for 'insulting' Erdoğan and state in 2022](#)," <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkish-prosecutors-launch-more-than-7500-cases-for-insulting-erdogan-and-state-in-2022-news-62175>, April 9, 2023.

¹³ ECtHR, *Affaire Vedat Şorli c. Turquie*, (no. 42048/19), October 19, 2021, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-212394%22%5D>. See also Ali Küçüköçmen, "[Top European court says Turkey should change law on insulting president](#)," <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/top-european-court-says-turkey-should-change-law-insulting-president-2021-10-19/>, Reuters, October 19, 2021.

prosecutors, and other perceived government critics for the exercise of rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly protected in the Covenant and in other international law, and specifically, to:

- Ensure full compliance with the binding rulings of the ECtHR, in particular through the immediate release of Osman Kavala, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, and full implementation of the Yüksel Yalçinkaya decision;
- Stop abusing its overly broad counterterrorism legislation as a tool of retaliation to limit the exercise of Covenant-protected rights;
- Conduct a full review of the legislation to ensure that all provisions are worded with sufficient precision and clarity to ensure that the offenses they describe are fully foreseeable and meet the threshold for being counted as internationally recognized crimes, and to introduce clear criteria limiting the application of charges such as “membership of a terrorist organization” to individuals for whom there is evidence of material connections with armed groups and their violent activities.
- Amend the Turkish Penal Code to decriminalize the range of defamation charges.

(2) Restrictions on online content and social media (Covenant articles 17, 19, and 21)

Since the Committee's last review of Türkiye, the Turkish authorities have greatly expanded their arsenal of legislation to control social media and arbitrarily restrict online news content and block whole websites. Türkiye's already problematic Law on the Regulation of Internet Broadcasts and Prevention of Crimes Committed through such Broadcasts (law no. 5651) has been amended several times, along with other laws, and contains some vague provisions which permit the restriction of content falling within the boundaries of permissible free expression, gives powers to courts and the administrative authorities to block and remove online content by administrative and court decisions in response to complaints from members of the government, and restricts the rights to privacy, freedom of expression, and the right to access information under the pretext of protecting national security or public order.¹⁴ Further restrictions have been imposed on social media companies forcing them to comply with takedown requests or face heavy fines and possible bandwidth reduction that can render platforms inaccessible.¹⁵

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch news release, “[Turkey: Strike Down Abusive Internet Measures,](https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/15/turkey-strike-down-abusive-internet-measures)” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/15/turkey-strike-down-abusive-internet-measures>, September 15, 2014. See Yaman Akdeniz & Ozan Guven, “Fahrenheit 5651, The Scorching Effect of Censorship,” Freedom of Expression Association, October 2021: https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb_2020_Eng.pdf

¹⁵ ARTICLE 19 & Human Rights Watch report: “[Turkey: Dangerous, Dystopian New Legal Amendments,](https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/14/turkey-dangerous-dystopian-new-legal-amendments)” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/14/turkey-dangerous-dystopian-new-legal-amendments>, October 14, 2022.

Türkiye has previously blocked access in the country to Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, Google Sites (a wiki and web page creation tool created by Google), and Wordpress platforms. In July and August 2024, the authorities also blocked access to Instagram for eight days and blocked access to the popular Wattpad and Roblox platforms.¹⁶

Turkish officials have indefinitely blocked the Deutsche Welle and Voice of America news platforms in the country since June 2022. The Freedom of Expression Association's EngelliWeb project announced that as of the end of March, Türkiye had blocked over one million websites, among them some Kurdish and other news websites.¹⁷

In decisions relating to Google Sites, YouTube, Twitter, and Wikipedia, the ECtHR and Türkiye's Constitutional Court have found violations of freedom of expression and of the right of the public to receive information as well as impart it.¹⁸

Under international law, governments have an obligation to ensure that any restrictions to information online are provided for in law, are a necessary and proportionate response to a specific threat, and are in the public interest.¹⁹ Türkiye's internet law fails in these respects.

Recommendations

The Committee should call on the Turkish government to:

- Stop the arbitrary blocking of online content, social media posts and websites where the content is legitimate expression protected under international law, and cease the blocking of whole platforms;
- Amend law 5651 to bring it into line with article 19 of the Covenant and to uphold the right to privacy of users

(3) Rising incidence of torture and ill-treatment, and impunity for violations of the right to life, enforced disappearances and abductions (Covenant articles 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14)

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch & Freedom of Expression Association (İFÖD), "[Türkiye: Restore Access to Instagram](https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/08/turkiye-restore-access-instagram)," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/08/turkiye-restore-access-instagram>, August 8, 2024.

¹⁷ EngelliWeb on X: "2024 Mart ayı sonu itibarıyla Türkiye'den erişime engellenen web sitesi/alan adı sayısı 1.000.000'u geçti." <https://t.co/so9Y4lDsdu> <https://t.co/mtAXkMGxLR> / X

¹⁸ ECtHR, Ahmet Yildirim v Turkey (application 3111/10), December 18, 2012:

<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng/?i=001-115705>; Cengiz and others v Ty (applications 48226/10 & 14027/11), December 1, 2015: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng/?i=001-159188>; BBC news website, "Turkey Twitter ban: Constitutional court rules illegal," <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26849941>, April 2, 2014; Wikipedia Foundation, "Turkish Constitutional Court rules that the two and a half year block of Wikipedia is unconstitutional," <https://wikimediafoundation.org/news/2019/12/26/turkish-constitutional-court-rules-that-the-two-and-a-half-year-block-of-wikipedia-is-unconstitutional/>, December 26, 2019.

¹⁹ UN Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 34, CCPR/C/GC/34, September 12, 2011: <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/gc34.pdf>,

The UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, and other sources, reported on the high incidence of cases of torture and ill-treatment in formal and informal custody settings in the immediate aftermath of the July 15, 2016 attempted military coup and expressed concerns about ongoing reports of torture 14 months after his visit to the country.²⁰

Human Rights Watch published two full reports which substantiate those findings and demonstrate that in the course of the year following the failed coup, law enforcement officers and security forces abused detainees who were held in custody for extended periods and had fewer safeguards under the state of emergency.²¹ With many of the detainees subsequently remanded to pretrial prison detention, the task of documenting their allegations has been a complex one, relying on the testimonies of lawyers, who were themselves under threat,²² medical reports, hand-written testimonies by victims from prison, and an extensive examination of court records in which detainees allege ill-treatment.

Over subsequent years and after the July 2018 lifting of the state of emergency, Human Rights Watch continued to document regular reports of police ill-treatment on arrest and in formal or unofficial custody settings in different cities, including cases of deaths in police, gendarmerie and military custody.²³ There have been few signs that the Turkish authorities have undertaken effective investigations into such incidents or ensured that perpetrators are held accountable.

²⁰ OHCHR, “[Preliminary observations and recommendations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, Mr. Nils Melzer on the Official visit to Turkey – 27 November to 2 December 2016](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2016/12/preliminary-observations-and-recommendations-united-nations-special-rapporteur?LangID=E&NewsID=20976),” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2016/12/preliminary-observations-and-recommendations-united-nations-special-rapporteur?LangID=E&NewsID=20976>, December 2, 2016; and OHCHR, “[Turkey: UN expert says deeply concerned by rise in torture allegations](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/02/turkey-un-expert-says-deeply-concerned-rise-torture-allegations),” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/02/turkey-un-expert-says-deeply-concerned-rise-torture-allegations>, February 27, 2018.

²¹ Human Rights Watch reports, “[A Blank Check: Turkey’s Post-Coup Suspension of Safeguards Against Torture](https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/10/26/blank-check/turkeys-post-coup-suspension-safeguards-against-torture),” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/10/26/blank-check/turkeys-post-coup-suspension-safeguards-against-torture>, October 25, 2016; “[In Custody : Police Torture and Abductions in Turkey](https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/12/custody/police-torture-and-abductions-turkey),” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/12/custody/police-torture-and-abductions-turkey>, October 12, 2017.

²² Human Rights Watch report, “[Lawyers on Trial: Abusive Prosecutions and Erosion of Fair Trial Rights in Turkey](https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/10/lawyers-trial/abusive-prosecutions-and-erosion-fair-trial-rights-turkey),” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/10/lawyers-trial/abusive-prosecutions-and-erosion-fair-trial-rights-turkey>, April 10, 2019; Human Rights Watch, “[Turkey: Lawyers Arrested in Terror Probe](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/16/turkey-lawyers-arrested-terror-probe),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/16/turkey-lawyers-arrested-terror-probe>, September 16, 2020.

²³ Human Rights Watch, news releases, “[Turkey: Police, Watchmen Involved in Torture, Ill-Treatment](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/29/turkey-police-watchmen-involved-torture-ill-treatment),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/29/turkey-police-watchmen-involved-torture-ill-treatment>, July 29, 2020. ; “[Turkey: Man Dies After Military Custody](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/01/turkey-man-dies-after-military-custody),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/01/turkey-man-dies-after-military-custody>, October 1, 2020; “[World Report 2022: Turkey chapter](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/turkey),” <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/turkey>, January 2022; Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International report, “[Turkey: Police and Gendarmerie Abuses in Earthquake Zone](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/05/turkey-police-and-gendarmerie-abuses-earthquake-zone#:~:text=(Istanbul)%20%E2%80%93%20Law%20enforcement%20officials,in%20custody%20after%20being%20tortured.),” [https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/05/turkey-police-and-gendarmerie-abuses-earthquake-zone#:~:text=\(Istanbul\)%20%E2%80%93%20Law%20enforcement%20officials,in%20custody%20after%20being%20tortured.](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/05/turkey-police-and-gendarmerie-abuses-earthquake-zone#:~:text=(Istanbul)%20%E2%80%93%20Law%20enforcement%20officials,in%20custody%20after%20being%20tortured.), April 5, 2023.

Prior to the July 2016 coup attempt, Human Rights Watch had received a rising number of complaints of torture and abuses in custody from Kurds in the southeast of the country, and had documented unlawful killing of Kurdish civilians and mass violations against the civilian population during operations by the security forces against PKK affiliates encamped in cities and blanket curfews in cities of the southeast.²⁴ There have been few signs that the Turkish authorities have undertaken effective investigations into such incidents or ensured that perpetrators are held accountable. In the case of killings and other violations in the southeast in the 2015-16 period, on June 23, 2016, the Turkish parliament passed a law preventing any investigation of the security forces for their conduct during counterterrorism operations without permission of the authorities.²⁵ This effectively represented a political move to shield the security forces from criminal prosecution. Efforts to address the violations and to press for justice for the civilian victims of conflict in the southeast in late 2015-16 were also rapidly overshadowed by the July 15, 2016 military coup attempt and the two year state of emergency that followed.

Human Rights Watch has documented cases of enforced disappearances of Turkish nationals in Türkiye in the period after the July 2016 coup attempt, reporting on five cases in 2017,²⁶ and eight cases in 2019-20,²⁷ as well as documenting cases of Turkish nationals being abducted and forcibly disappeared from countries around the world and removed to Türkiye where they resurface in custody.²⁸ The majority of these cases concern men accused of links with the Gulen movement which the Turkish authorities refer to as the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization/Parallel State Structure (FETÖ/PDY) and hold responsible for the military coup attempt.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch submission to [UN Committee against Torture prior to review of Turkey](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/2016/04/22/un-committee-against-torture-review-turkey), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/22/un-committee-against-torture-review-turkey>, April 22, 2016; Human Rights Watch reports, “[Turkey: Mounting Security Operation Deaths](https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/22/turkey-mounting-security-operation-deaths),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/22/turkey-mounting-security-operation-deaths>, December 22, 2015; “[Turkey: State Blocks Probes of Southeast Killings](https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/11/turkey-state-blocks-probes-southeast-killings),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/11/turkey-state-blocks-probes-southeast-killings>, July 11, 2016.

²⁵ Reuters, “[Turkey grants immunity to security forces fighting militants](https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkey-grants-immunity-to-security-forces-fighting-militants-idUSKCN0ZA1JU/),” <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkey-grants-immunity-to-security-forces-fighting-militants-idUSKCN0ZA1JU/> June 24, 2016.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch news report, “[Turkey: Investigate Ankara Abductions, Disappearances](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/03/turkey-investigate-ankara-abductions-disappearances),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/03/turkey-investigate-ankara-abductions-disappearances>, August 3, 2017; Human Rights Watch report, “[In Custody : Police Torture and Abductions in Turkey](https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/12/custody/police-torture-and-abductions-turkey),” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/12/custody/police-torture-and-abductions-turkey>, October 12, 2017, pp. 33-42.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch news release, “[Turkey: Concerns for Disappeared Men Now in Police Custody](https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/06/turkey-concerns-disappeared-men-now-police-custody),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/06/turkey-concerns-disappeared-men-now-police-custody>, August 6, 2019; Human Rights Watch report, “[Turkey: Enforced Disappearances, Torture](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/29/turkey-enforced-disappearances-torture),” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/29/turkey-enforced-disappearances-torture> (hrw.org), April 29, 2020.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch report, “[‘We Will Find You’: A Global Look at How Governments Repress Nationals Abroad](https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/22/we-will-find-you/global-look-how-governments-repress-nationals-abroad),” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/22/we-will-find-you/global-look-how-governments-repress-nationals-abroad>, February 22, 2024, p. 19.

Human Rights Watch's research has found little evidence that the Turkish authorities have undertaken effective investigations into the credible allegations, supported by security camera footage and witness statements, that enforced disappearances occurred during the reporting period and especially in the period 2017-19 in Ankara, as well as in some other cities.

In the cases examined, the detention of men in police custody was only acknowledged after their families had lodged multiple complaints seeking investigation of their whereabouts. However, many victims chose not to file their own complaints concerning their disappearance or any torture to which they may have been subjected. Human Rights Watch has concerns that they may have felt under pressure not to exercise their right to pursue complaints out of fear of retaliation or may have been offered release from detention on condition of foregoing complaints.

In at least four other cases of enforced disappearances, however, the victims did file complaints or complained during hearings before courts, and in two cases Türkiye's Constitutional Court has found procedural violations of the prohibition on torture (article 17 of the Constitution) in terms of lack of effective investigation.²⁹

Human Rights Watch has received no information about whether there have been any new investigations or their outcome following the decisions of the Constitutional Court.

As far as efforts to secure the accountability of the security forces for the hundreds of historic cases of enforced disappearances and summary killings of Kurds in the southeastern region in the 1990s, all trials of military personnel and others have resulted in acquittal in proceedings that have disregarded compelling evidence against the defendants.³⁰

Recommendations

The Committee should recommend that the government of Turkey undertakes the following urgent measures:

Concerning legal reforms

- Repeal the provision in the Anti-Terror Law that restricts the right of a detainee in police or gendarmerie custody suspected of terrorism offenses to legal counsel

²⁹ Constitutional Court, *Ayşe Rana Özben ve diğerleri*, B. No: 2017/28717, 24/2/2021; *Önder Asan*, B. No: 2018/18685, 16/3/2023.

³⁰ For a summary of the acquittals in one such trial, see Human Rights Watch news release, "[Turkey: No Answers for Kurdish Victims](https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/05/turkey-no-answers-kurdish-victims)," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/05/turkey-no-answers-kurdish-victims>, November 5, 2015. For a full account of the flawed criminal proceedings and acquittals in trials against military personnel and other public officials prosecuted for their alleged involvement in enforced disappearances and summary killings, see Emel Ataktürk Sevimli, Esra Kılıç, Gülistan Zeren, Melis Gebeş & Özlem Zıngıl, "[1990'lı Yillardaki Ağır İnsan Hakları İhlallerinde Cezasızlık Sorunu: Kovuşturma Süreci | Hafıza Merkezi](https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/yayinlar/1990li-yillardaki-agir-insan-haklari-ihlallerinde-cezasizlik-sorunu-kovusturma-sureci)" ("[The problem of Impunity for grave human rights violations in the 1990s: the trial process](https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/yayinlar/1990li-yillardaki-agir-insan-haklari-ihlallerinde-cezasizlik-sorunu-kovusturma-sureci)"), <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/yayinlar/1990li-yillardaki-agir-insan-haklari-ihlallerinde-cezasizlik-sorunu-kovusturma-sureci>, 2021 (Turkish only, English version forthcoming in 2024).

for the first 24 hours of detention at the request of a prosecutor and on the decision of a judge;

- Revise appendix article 2 of the Anti-Terror Law, and article 4 of the Law on the Powers and Duties of the Police, to ensure that the use of force by law enforcement officials is compatible with relevant international standards that provide that lethal force be used as a last resort where necessary in order to protect life;
- Revise Law 4483 on the Trials of Civil Servants and other public officials and take any other necessary legislative measures to ensure that civil servants, including police and other law enforcement officers of all ranks, can be prosecuted without administrative authorization for all serious crimes or abuse of power.

Concerning the effective investigation of torture and ill-treatment

- Ensure that all video and audio recording devices, whether from armored personnel carriers employed during security operations, or from police and gendarmerie stations during all interviews with suspects in custody, and in all locations in police and gendarmerie stations, are operational at all times, cannot be tampered with or erased, and are promptly and routinely made available to public prosecutors for purposes of investigating allegations of human rights violations;
- Ensure that prosecutors investigate the responsibility of commanding officers where law enforcement officials are alleged to have perpetrated acts of ill-treatment including torture. Commanding officers who know or should have known of such acts, and who fail to take action to prevent and punish them, should be included in prosecutors' investigation and, where appropriate, face sanctions;
- Ensure that effective and meaningful disciplinary sanctions alongside criminal sanctions are imposed on law enforcement officials who engage in torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- Ensure that commanding officers who know or should have known of such acts, and who fail to take action to prevent and punish them also face disciplinary sanctions;
- Suspend from active duty officers under investigation for torture and other ill-treatment and ensure their dismissal if convicted;
- Make the Forensic Medical Institute both functionally and formally independent from the Ministry of Justice;
- Urgently lift restrictions on access to places of detention by representatives of independent non-governmental organizations, medical professionals, and members of local bar associations.

(4) Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Covenant articles 2, 3, 6, 7, 26)

Türkiye was the first country to ratify the Istanbul Convention, which opened for signature on May 11, 2011, in Istanbul and, on March 20, 2021, the first country to withdraw from it. The Turkish government's spurious justification for leaving cited the convention's inclusive approach to sexual orientation and gender identity as evidence that the convention had been – in the words of the president's communications chief - “hijacked by a group of people attempting to normalize homosexuality – which is incompatible with Turkey's social and family values.” Many lawyers and activists working on women's rights and LGBT rights in Türkiye view withdrawal from the convention as a major setback, demonstrating lack of political commitment to gender equality, without which there remain huge obstacles to combatting domestic violence and violence against women in Türkiye and addressing its root causes.

Key provisions of the convention are nevertheless enshrined in Turkey's Law to Protect the Family and Prevent Violence against Women (Law No. 6284). Moreover, Turkey is bound by other international human rights law such as UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the ECHR obliging it to combat violence against women. Turkey is obliged to implement European Court of Human Rights judgments, including those relating to the Court's finding of a pattern of state failure to protect women from domestic violence in the case of *Opuz v. Turkey*, and four other similar cases.

Human Rights Watch's research demonstrates the failures of implementation of measures in Law 6284 to protect women and girls from violence. shows that while police and courts are issuing preventive and protective cautionary orders, failure to ensure they are observed leaves dangerous protection gaps for women if not rendering them meaningless. Courts often issue cautionary orders for far too brief periods, and the authorities fail to undertake effective risk assessments or monitor the effectiveness of the orders, leaving survivors of domestic violence at risk of ongoing – and at times deadly – abuse. Some perpetrators breach the terms of preventive cautionary orders without penalty.

The Interior Ministry's own figures presented to a parliamentary commission on violence against women demonstrate that in around 8.5 percent of cases of women killed between 2016 and 2021, the woman had been granted an ongoing protective or preventive order at the time of her murder. In 2021, 38 of the 307 women killed were under protection, the highest number over the previous five-year period for which figures are recorded. There has been no official announcement of the numbers in subsequent years, although the interior minister announced in July 2024 that 308 women were killed by violent men in 2023, and 166 in the first six months of 2024.³¹

³¹ [Gazi Nogay, “İçişleri Bakanı Yerlikaya: 2023 yılında maalesef 308 kadın, uğradığı şiddet nedeniyle hayatını kaybetti,”](https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/icisleri-bakani-yerlikaya-2023-yilinda-maalesef-308-kadin-ugradigi-siddet-nedeniyle-hayatini-kaybetti/3271305) (“Interior Minister Yerlikaya: In 2023 unfortunately 308 women lost their lives from violence”) <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/icisleri-bakani-yerlikaya-2023-yilinda-maalesef-308-kadin-ugradigi-siddet-nedeniyle-hayatini-kaybetti/3271305>, Anatolian Agency, July 10, 2024.

While penalties for men who murder women have risen over the years, there needs to be more focus on the failure of the authorities to prevent these murders. There should be clear processes for investigating and holding to account public authorities in cases where they have not exercised due diligence in preventing and protecting victims of domestic violence.

Recommendations:

Concerning efforts to combat violence against women and girls, the Committee should recommend that the government of Türkiye

- Ensures that the Ministry of Justice Department of Judicial Statistics supplies and publishes detailed disaggregated data about the outcome of criminal investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and acquittals of perpetrators of violence against women and domestic violence under all articles of the Turkish Penal Code, focusing not only on murder but also on cases of physical assault, rape and sexual violence (including marital rape), verbal and online or other harassment, threats, insults, stalking, attacks on property, and any other relevant offenses;
- Provides information about the number of women for whom there had been protection orders at the time of their death in the years 2022 and 2023;
- Provides details of any investigations against public officials for failure to exercise due diligence in their duty to ensure the safety of women and girls who have been reported to be at risk of domestic violence and discharge their obligation to take all available measures to uphold their right to life;

(5) Abuses against Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers (articles 7, 9, 12, 13, 24)

Türkiye officially hosts 3.1 million Syrians under a temporary protection regime and at least 320,000 non-Syrians, mostly Afghans, the majority of whom face insurmountable obstacles in applying for the uniquely Turkish “conditional refugee” status reserved for non-Europeans in need of international protection. Although Türkiye has rightly earned international acclaim and support for hosting the largest number of refugees of any country in the world, it is routinely pushing many Afghans back at its borders or deporting them to Afghanistan with little to no examination of their claims for international protection. Since the border closed late in 2015, Syrians attempting to cross into Türkiye have also faced mass pushbacks to Syria. In both cases, Human Rights Watch has extensively documented multiple incidents in which members of the security forces have tortured, shot or otherwise violently pushed back Syrian and Afghan men apprehended at the border.³²

³² Human Rights Watch reports, [“No One Asked Me Why I Left Afghanistan’: Pushbacks and Deportations of Afghans from Turkey,”](https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/11/18/no-one-asked-me-why-i-left) [https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/11/18/no-one-asked-me-why-i-left-](https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/11/18/no-one-asked-me-why-i-left)

Human Rights Watch has also extensively documented multiple cases of Syrian and Afghan nationals held in deportation centers being coerced – sometimes through beatings in addition to threats – to sign voluntary return forms before their summary removal to Syria or Afghanistan.³³ The practice is ongoing and may also apply to other groups who are at risk – among them Eritreans.³⁴

Pushbacks violate multiple human rights norms, including the prohibition of collective expulsion under the ECHR, the right to due process in the Covenant, and the principle of nonrefoulement under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which prohibits the return of refugees to places where their lives or freedom would be threatened. Refoulement is also prohibited in Turkish law. Because Turkish authorities block access to asylum, refoul people who appear to be refugees, and commit other abuses against migrants and people seeking international protection, the European Union (EU), its member states, and other countries should not regard Turkey as a safe third country for Afghan, Syrian, and other refugees and asylum seekers.

In July 2024, crowds attacked property and homes of Syrians in several neighborhoods of the central Anatolian city of Kayseri and burnt many cars they identified as belonging to foreigners from their number plates prefaced with letter M. According to media reports, other attacks took place in several cities, and a 15-year-old Syrian boy died in a knife attack by a mob in Antalya.³⁵ For the past few years, there has been growing xenophobic sentiment against refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Türkiye, on occasion escalating to violent attacks on individuals or property. Politicians from certain opposition parties have regularly weaponized the issue of refugees against the government, and the government has in turn failed to stamp out the practice of

[afghanistan/pushbacks-and-deportations-afghans-turkey, November 18, 2022.](https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/23/turkey-syrians-pushed-back-border) “Turkey: Syrians Pushed Back at the Border,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/23/turkey-syrians-pushed-back-border>, November 23, 2015; “Turkey: Mass Deportations of Syrians,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/22/turkey-mass-deportations-syrians>, March 22, 2018; “Turkish Border Guards Torture, Kill Syrians,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/27/turkish-border-guards-torture-kill-syrians>, April 27, 2023; “Turkey: Hundreds of Refugees Deported to Syria,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/24/turkey-hundreds-refugees-deported-syria>, October 22, 2022; “Syrians Face Dire Conditions in Turkish-Occupied ‘Safe Zone’,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/28/syrians-face-dire-conditions-turkish-occupied-safe-zone>, March 28, 2024.

³³ Human Rights Watch report, “Turkey: Hundreds of Refugees Deported to Syria,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/24/turkey-hundreds-refugees-deported-syria>, October 22, 2022; “Syrians Face Dire Conditions in Turkish-Occupied ‘Safe Zone’,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/28/syrians-face-dire-conditions-turkish-occupied-safe-zone>, March 28, 2024.

³⁴ Amnesty International, “Türkiye: Eritreans at imminent risk of forced return,” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/8493/2024/en/>, September 6, 2024.

³⁵ Nicolas Bourcier, “Syrian refugees attacked in Turkey: ‘The crisis makes us perfect scapegoats’,” https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/20/syrian-refugees-attacked-in-turkey-the-crisis-makes-us-perfect-scapegoats_6691629_4.html, July 20, 2024. ; Bianet news website, “Thousands of Syrians forced to leave Kayseri following anti-refugee violence,” <https://bianet.org/haber/thousands-of-syrians-forced-to-leave-kayseri-following-anti-refugee-violence-299089>, August 28, 2024; The New Arab news website, “Syrian teenager stabbed to death in Turkey amid ongoing tensions,” <https://www.newarab.com/news/syrian-teenager-stabbed-death-turkey-amid-ongoing-tensions>, July 5, 2024.

refoulement and pushbacks and shown an unwillingness to take the necessary firm stand to protect the rights of refugees.

Recommendations

Concerning adherence to the prohibition on refoulement

- Immediately halt all summary pushbacks of asylum seekers from Turkish territory at Türkiye's borders;
- Affirm the commitment to upholding the obligation not to subject Syrians, Iranians, Afghans and other groups at risk to refoulement;
- In the case of Syrian nationals, adhere to this obligation regardless of whether or not the individual has temporary protection status, and regardless of whether the individual is living and working in a city other than where their temporary protection ID and address are registered;
- End the practice of coercing Syrians and other groups into signing voluntary return forms as a pretext to deport them.
- Ensure that reports of torture and ill-treatment, or cruel inhuman and degrading treatment in deportation centres and shootings, beatings, and other abuses at the borders are fully investigated and perpetrators held accountable for any abuses.

The Committee should further call on the Turkish government to:

- Address and prevent hate speech and widespread vilification of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants;
- Issue clear and unequivocal statements at the highest level to the effect that the government will not tolerate hate speech and vilification of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and clearly condemn all attacks that have taken place on refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and their property in cities such as Kayseri, pledging to ensure full investigation leading to the prosecution of perpetrators and penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crimes.

(6) Abuses Committed by Turkish and Syrian Forces in Turkish-occupied Areas of Northern Syria (Covenant articles 2, 6, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17, 21, 26, 27)

Human Rights Watch draws the Committee's attention to the organization's detailed documentation of egregious human rights violations including abductions, torture, sexual violence and extrajudicial killings by various factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), as well as the Military Police and members of the Turkish Armed Forces and Turkish intelligence agencies, including the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MIT) and a number of military intelligence directorates in the areas of northern Syria where Türkiye exercises de facto control as an

occupying force.³⁶ Human Rights Watch has also documented violations of housing, land, and property rights, including widespread looting and pillaging as well as property seizures and extortion, and has exposed the abject failure of most of the accountability measures introduced in recent years to curb abuses or to provide restitution to victims.

After its military operations since 2016 in the predominantly Arab region north of Aleppo that includes Azaz, al-Bab, and Jarablus, the previously Kurdish-majority Afrin, and a narrow strip of land along Syria's northern border between the ethnically diverse towns of Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ain, Türkiye bears direct responsibility for many of the detention-related abuses among other violations that continue to occur in those territories. In cases documented by Human Rights Watch, the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI), and other human rights organizations, Kurds have overwhelmingly borne the brunt of these abuses, often on suspicion of links with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), or the Democratic Union Party (PYD), Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) or the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and affiliates. Arabs and others under SDF rule perceived to have had close ties with the SDF and AANES have also been targeted. As long as impunity for grave and systematic human rights abuses and possible war crimes reigns, hopes of return for the hundreds of thousands displaced and dispossessed Syrians who fled their homes during and after Türkiye's successive military operations into the region continue to diminish. Many live in overstretched and underserved camps and collective shelters across north Syria today.

In late October 2023, Türkiye carried out a wave of airstrikes that targeted electricity and oil infrastructure in Syria's Kurdish-held northeast Syria, resulting in water and electricity disruptions for millions of people.³⁷ In December and January 2024, it intensified its strikes to include medical facilities and crucial access roads used by humanitarian responders.³⁸ Attacks which cause disproportionate damage to civilians and civilian objects are prohibited under international humanitarian law, and deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure is a war crime. The repeated strikes on civilian infrastructure have left many essential facilities in ruins, rendering hospitals, bakeries, and water facilities inoperable.

The Committee should ask the state party to supply detailed information about the steps it is taking to halt acts of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

³⁶ Human Rights Watch report, "[Everything is by the Power of the Weapon": Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria](https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/29/everything-power-weapon/abuses-and-impunity-turkish-occupied-northern-syria)", <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/29/everything-power-weapon/abuses-and-impunity-turkish-occupied-northern-syria>, February 29, 2024; Hiba Zayadin, Human Rights Watch dispatch, "[Türkiye's Troubling Embrace of Syrian Groups Accused of Grave Crimes](https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/30/turkiyes-troubling-embrace-syrian-groups-accused-grave-crimes)," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/30/turkiyes-troubling-embrace-syrian-groups-accused-grave-crimes>, July 30, 2024.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch report, "Northeast Syria: Turkish Airstrikes Disrupt Water and Electricity," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/26/northeast-syria-turkish-strikes-disrupt-water-electricity>, October 26, 2023.

³⁸ Hiba Zayadin, Human Rights Watch dispatch, "Türkiye's strikes wreak havoc in northeast Syria," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/09/turkiyes-strikes-wreak-havoc-northeast-syria>, February 9, 2024.

committed by its military forces and intelligence personnel, together with affiliated local militias, that constitute not only human rights violations but potential war crimes and ensure that all individuals under its control, including military personnel and armed groups, adhere to international human rights law and humanitarian law, in particular the absolute prohibition on torture and inhuman and degrading treatment.

The Committee should ask the state party to provide details about the number and outcome of any investigations into allegations that Turkish Armed Forces and intelligence agencies operating in the occupied territories are involved in torture and rape of civilians, as well as other serious violations including arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, seizures of property and looting which would constitute both serious human rights violations and potential war crimes.

Recommendations

The Committee should recommend that the government of Türkiye undertakes the following urgent measures:

Concerning the investigation of abuses committed in areas of Syria where Türkiye exercises de facto control

- Conduct a transparent, thorough, and impartial investigation into allegations that Turkish Armed Forces and intelligence agencies and affiliated local militias, operating in the Syrian occupied territories, are involved in the torture and rape of civilians, as well as other serious violations, including arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings, which would constitute both serious human rights violations and potential war crimes.
- Cooperate fully with independent and impartial investigations by international bodies, such as the United Nations Commission of Inquiry and human rights organizations, into alleged human rights violations and war crimes including torture, rape and other prohibited ill-treatment;
- Ensure full and unhindered access for international and independent monitors to Turkish-occupied territories, including the prisons and detention centers run by the Military Police and those of the various factions, as well as the military courts;
- Establish robust oversight mechanisms to monitor the conduct of all Turkish and Turkish-aligned forces and promptly address any reported abuses;
- Hold those responsible for abuses accountable, including through fair and transparent trials;
- Ensure the elimination of all makeshift or unofficial jails and detention centers belonging to Syrian National Army factions;
- Develop and implement, through a transparent and participatory process and, in accordance with international standards, a reparations program for all victims of serious human rights violations committed by Turkish forces and local forces

Türkiye controls since it conducted a military incursion and occupied territories of northern Syria. Reparations should include public acknowledgment of victims' suffering, restitution, compensation, psychosocial and physical rehabilitation.

Concerning Turkish airstrikes on Kurdish-held northeast Syria:

- Immediately stop targeting critical civilian infrastructure, respect international humanitarian law and hold to account those responsible for serious violations.