

In Turkey Repressions Targeting Human Rights Defenders Continue

As human rights organizations, we are concerned over the consequences of the Operation Peace Spring launched on October 9, 2019, that has resulted in the curtailing of rights and freedoms, most severely the right to freedom of expression, and put immense pressure on civil society.

The police intervention against the **Saturday Mothers'** 759th gathering held on October 12, the first Saturday after the beginning of the operation, the investigations launched against MPs who called the operation "a war", the arrests of 24 people out of 186 who had been taken into custody within one week because of their social media posts according to the information provided by the Ministry of Interior, are of concern to civil society. These practices pose a threat to the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of assembly and protest enshrined in the Constitution and related law.

In addition to such practices and procedures that use the law as a harassment tool for individuals and institutions demanding peace, the lynching attempts that go way beyond criticism and directly target those voicing criticisms pose a serious threat as well. In this context, the statements of a well-known journalist in a TV program, targeting and insulting **Eren Keskin**, the co-chair of the Human Rights Association, pose a serious threat to life considering the fact that we have lost well-known figures of civil society, journalists and rights defenders as a result of attacks following similar attempts that painted them as targets.

After being targeted, Keskin has received many threats, her house was raided and she was asked to provide a statement on October 22. Keskin gave a police statement on charges of "terrorist propaganda" for statements she made on behalf of the Human Rights Association.

Eren Keskin is a rights defender, who has been fighting against grave violations of human rights and more specifically rights violations targeting women and has also been the target of excessive punishments in the context of the right to freedom of expression. Only in October, a fine of TRY 50,000 was imposed on her in a case where she stood trial on similar charges. It was announced that if she fails to pay the required amount in installments until the end of the year, she will be subject to probation measures.

Human rights defender **Nurcan Baysal's** house was raided by more than 30 police officers on October 19 for her "social media posts". Similarly, **Zeynep Ceren Boztoprak**, an executive of İHD's Istanbul Branch, was called in to provide a statement on charges of "propaganda for a terrorist organization" on October 21. Human rights defender **Nurcan Kaya** was taken under custody on the morning of October 27 and released with an international travel ban after giving her statement.

Moreover, pressures on civil society activities not only include criticisms against the Operation Peace Spring. These pressures and bans have been increasing in recent years.

The conference on “Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region”, which was announced by the **Hrant Dink Foundation** weeks ago to take place on October 18, 19 in Kayseri, was banned by the Governorate of Kayseri. Later on, following the decision to move the conference to Istanbul, this time, the conference was banned by the Şişli District Governorate on October 17. As a result, a scientific conference could not to find a host-city.

As shown by these developments in recent weeks, members of civil society are targeted with a disregard for free speech, creating new restrictions and limitations on civil society. Rights organizations responsible for documenting, monitoring rights violations and supporting victims to facilitate their access to justice are punished for rights violations they document and make public.

All these developments reveal a pattern of systematic attacks against civil society’s ordinary and legitimate activities carried out in accordance with the law. Preventing institutions and individuals that have a responsibility to protect and consider the right to freedom of expression from carrying out their duty will only result in heightening public opposition as evidenced by many examples in Turkey and around the world.

Defending human rights is a right guaranteed by national and international law. These pressures exerted on human rights defenders and civil society organizations must stop.

- **Association for Monitoring Equal Rights**
- **Citizens’ Assembly**
- **Civic Space Studies Association**
- **Civil Rights Defenders**
- **Human Rights Agenda Association**
- **Human Rights Association**
- **Human Rights Foundation of Turkey**
- **Media and Law Studies Association**
- **The Rights Initiative**
- **Truth Justice Memory Center**