



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 May 2017]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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## Situation of journalists in Turkey

Turkey is ranked 155th of 180 countries in Reporter without Borders's 2017 World Press Freedom Index. This means that Turkey has fallen 4 places compared to the previous year.

Especially since the coup effort in July 2016, the situation of journalists and the media has worsened. The attacks on the media escalate and the repression against journalists and media outlets have become a daily basis. About 150 journalists are in Turkish prison without a trial now, 150 media outlets were closed, 700 press identity cards were cancelled and almost 2,500 media workers have lost their jobs. This situation has bad effects on the life of these people in the society. They cannot get a new job, cannot feed their families anymore. And their children are called terrorist children in schools and parks.

In no other country in the world there are so many journalists in police custody than in Turkey: 49.

The Turkish government, especially President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which has got more power after the referendum in April 2017, leads the way in the attacks on journalists and critics. The latest example for this strategy is the German - Turkish journalist and Turkish correspondent of the German newspaper *die Welt*, Deniz Yücel. He has been in isolated solitary confinement for 66 days now. The allegation is always the same. Either it is "propaganda in connection or for a terrorist organization" or "insulting the president". Another example is the fate of the two journalists, Can Dündar and Erdem Gül. Both of them are journalists for the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* (Can Dündar was also the editor in chief). Can Dündar reported on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015 about a delivery of the Turkish Secret Service MIT in 2014. In this delivery, weapons were being recognized for Islamic radical terrorist groups in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has been proved by pictures. Erdogan personally accused Dündar of spying and demanded a life sentence. He called the journalistic work an "insult" against the Turkish state and Secret Service MIT. Besides, he accused them of betrayal and publication of confidential documents. Can Dündar was condemned to five years of prison, but he left Turkey in July 2016 to Germany and since lives there in exile. He is working in Germany, furthering the freedom of Turkish press and trying to give to all democrats a voice. In this connection, it is important to mention that these journalists only do their job. They try to inform people about the political situation, which is "journalism". And journalism is not a crime.

Furthermore, the censorship of online social networks has reached unprecedented levels. In the past there were more often censored websites like YouTube, Twitter or Twitter and Facebook accounts. Last week on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2017, Turkey has censored all language versions of Wikipedia, the worldwide free encyclopedia. It is interesting to see that this time no court order was given for this decision. This means that the Turkish government operates arbitrarily and reduces the right of the access to any information.

But not only journalists and the right for free media are under pressure. Notably human rights for minorities like Kurds, Christians, Yazidis and Alevis are at risk in Turkey.

The Alevi people in Turkey have already suffered much their history. One day after the world press freedom day, on the 4<sup>th</sup> May, they condemned the massacre in Dersim/Tunceli in 1937/38. Dersim is a region in Eastern Anatolia. The city is primarily populated by Alevi Kurds. In 1937/38 the Turkish government has exercised a massacre of the Alevi Kurds. During this massacre, about 70,000 people were killed. But also during the years afterwards the Alevi and Kurdish minorities in Turkey were attacked. It is the case for example in Maras, Corum and Sivas, and also last year by the increasing state repression in majority-Kurdish cities like Sirnak, Nusaybin or Diyarbakir/Sur. With the state of emergency the civil war was intensified. This time it was justified with the argument of "fighting terrorists", but many civilians became victims or demanded to be resettled in other cities. Many think that other ethnic groups are brought in these cities in order to alter the demographic composition. Today on 8 May, 2017, the Turkish state starts to build TOKI houses. TOKI is the "state house building authority".

The daily life in Turkey is becoming more Islamic, which makes life harder for. They cannot live their faith as freely as the Alevi people. With the refugees, mostly Yazidis and Kurds from Syria, the situation becomes more complicated and difficult.

The Turkish government and the AKP party have always the same reasons for all these repressions: all the minorities, they say, want to weaken the Turkish state and build up a new own state. But actually, it is a war against all non-Sunni people and people who do not live like the AKP wants them to do. These actions cannot be accepted in a democracy.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the members of the Human Rights council to call on the government of Turkey to:

- Release all political prisoners,
  - Release all journalists,
  - Allow for freedom of faith and religion for all ethnic and religious groups,
  - Allow for freedom of speech and press,
  - Allow for regional self-government for Kurds and other minorities.
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