



RESOLUTION ON THE DESTRUCTION OF KURDISH CULTURE IN TURKEY

On Turkey's destruction of Kurdish Culture:

Two years since the breakdown of a fragile peace process between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish state forces, the impact of the Turkish authorities' sustained onslaught on Kurdish language and culture is becoming ever more blatant and harrowing.

The Turkish authorities have repeatedly cracked down on Kurdish literary and cultural symbols, language and media outlets. At least 87 municipalities in the towns and cities with Kurdish majority have been taken over by the government and their democratically elected mayors and officials removed or jailed. Up to half a million people have been displaced since July 2015, with extended round-the-clock curfews affecting hundreds of thousands of people. An estimated 1,200 local residents and 800 members of the security forces have been killed during brutal clashes, which saw a further 2,040 civilians wounded.

Since July 2015, scores of historical sites and buildings in the Kurdish regions have been destroyed. The Sur district in the city of Diyarbakir, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2015, has been the site of some of the fiercest fighting, with entire neighbourhoods demolished. Government-appointed provincial authorities have also taken down several local cultural monuments throughout the region, including the statues of prominent classic Kurdish writer Ehmedê Xanî in the city of Bazid and of Kurdish politician Orhan Doğan in the city of Cizîre. The Tahir Elçi park in Van's Çatak province, named after the Kurdish human rights lawyer killed in November 2015, was also renamed in honour of a fallen soldier.

The crackdown on Kurdish language intensified following the coup attempt on 15 July 2016, resulting in the closure of most pro-Kurdish and Kurdish language media outlets, including 16 TV stations, 10 radio stations and three news agencies. On 1 January 2017, the Turkish Press and Advertisement Council declared that 'all font and text except advertisements on any print press has to be in Turkish', leaving the Kurdish language press in shambles.

At least 36 journalists from pro-Kurdish outlets have been arrested since July 2016, joining another 21 already detained. Among the detained is news editor and reporter Nedim Türfent, who has been held in solitary confinement for more than a year, conditions that amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. When he appeared in court on 14 June 2017, a dozen witnesses claimed to have been tortured into signing incriminatory statements against him.

Thousands of teachers and academics have been dismissed by emergency decree as part of a nation-wide purge. Among them are those who signed a January 2016 peace petition calling for an end to army abuses in the southeast. On 11 November 2016, the activities of some 370 NGOs were arbitrarily suspended, over half of them Kurdish organisations. Tens of writers are behind bars merely for practising their right to free expression. Linguists and those promoting Kurdish language, culture and heritage are all targeted under anti-terror law.

In the light of this situation, the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International calls on the Turkish authorities to:

- Lift the state of emergency;
- Immediately release all those held in prison for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression; including; Mihemed Ronahî, Hasîp Yanlıç, Yusuf Karataş, Mewlûd Aykoç, and Nedim Türfent;
- Respect the right of Kurdish people to use and promote their own language and culture and to study in their mother tongue. Therefore end the destruction of Kurdish culture and heritage and rebuild sites of cultural heritage; Promote Kurdish language and linguistic rights including by withdrawing their reservation to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and ratifying the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; reinstate dismissed teachers and allow the Kurdish Institute to reopen;
- Review the Anti-Terror Law so as to ensure that counter-terrorism measures are compatible with Article 19(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and End the far-reaching crackdown on freedom of expression that has consistently escalated since the failed coup of July 2016;
- Permit the reopening and independent operation of closed media outlets (including online publications) and halt executive interference with independent news organisations, including in relation to editorial decisions, dismissals of journalists and editors, pressure and intimidation against critical news outlets and journalists; end the prosecutions and detention of journalists simply on the basis of the content of their journalism or alleged affiliations;

PEN International continues to call for a peaceful solution to the conflict and urges the international community to take all possible measures, including through international and regional institutions, to solve such dire situation and to provide humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the conflict, notably through artistic and cultural programmes.