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Submission to GA report
SR on freedom of expression

TURKEY

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Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları DerneĐi-İHD) is a non-governmental, independent, and voluntary body. The association, which was founded in 1986 by 98 human rights defenders, today has 28 branches, 5 representative offices, and 7,945 members. İHD is the oldest and largest human rights organization in Turkey and its “sole and specific goal is to promote ‘human rights and freedoms.’”

INTRODUCTION

The Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği* -İHD) is the oldest and largest human rights organization in Turkey. As a non-governmental and voluntary body the association has been working to protect and promote fundamental human rights and freedoms without any discrimination regarding race, ethnic background, language, religion or sect and faith, color, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, political and philosophical views, etc. since its foundation in 1986. The association's central office is located in Ankara, Turkey and has 28 local branches along with 6 representative offices and 7,945 members.

İHD is also among the founders of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) and the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), founding member of the Human Rights Joint Platform (HRJP), and member of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), EuroMed Rights (EMHRN), and the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT). İHD submits its views in respect of Turkey before the UN Human Rights Committee's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) procedure both in its own capacity and in collaboration with other human rights organizations in Turkey.

Submission by İHD

In Turkey, many women's associations have recently been closed down; hundreds of women have been taken into police custody, subjected to police violence, and stood trials while exercising their right to peaceful assembly protesting Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention¹ and femicide in the country. Further, the number of complaints alleging kidnapping and forced informant-making attempts against women human rights defenders and activists has increased.² Online threats and bullying against women have been observed even more through the impact of the pandemic as well. Digital harassment and threats against women have intensified. Women politicians have been targets of arrest and detention campaigns.³ Women in trade unions promoting labor rights have also been arrested and detained⁴ within the scope of an extensive judicial harassment campaign against rights defenders in the country.

Women human rights defenders, feminist activists, women politicians, leaders and journalists in Turkey have long been facing threats and judicial harassment as in the cases of Rosa Women's Association, Star Women's Association, Human Rights Association's Co-Chair Eren Keskin, and Turkish Medical Association's Chair Şebnem Korur Fincancı.⁵ According to a recent report drafted by the Coalition of Women in Journalism,⁶ Turkey tops the list of countries with the highest number of incidents of violence against women journalists. The report states that a total of 114 women journalists in Turkey were subjected to judicial harassment, attacks, and threats.

In Turkey, a feminist perspective promotes equality by materializing fair practices based on gender equality that would empower women and the society as a whole against the deep-seated feudal/patriarchal mentality, which has long been reproduced by the political power and consolidated in many institutions. Equal representation and policy documents to this end, institutional feminist approaches to prevent the suppression of women's voices both within institutions and with others are vital in practice.

There are no concrete, functional, and implemented measures to specifically promote and protect women's right to freedom of thought and expression in Turkey. Moreover, accurate statistical data are not available or inaccessible as observed in İHD's submissions for access to information before related ministries in the country and in media screenings as well.

In spite of the fact that Turkey's national legislation has Law No. 6284 and others to protect women against gender-based violence and harassment, the major problem lies in their implementation. Further, Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention⁷ has had immensely negative impacts on the society. Rights organizations brought a lawsuit against the withdrawal decision before the Council of State [Danıştay]. Even though Turkey declared its withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, it is still a party to CEDAW. Yet, the discrepancy between the written law and its implementation due to the lack of rule of law in the country, problems remain unsolved. It is, thus, our belief that other signatory States also have a part in this state of affairs in the country because the monitoring mechanisms of the conventions Turkey signed but is failing to implement are not adequately utilized.

States should adopt methods based on gender equality beginning with the initial stages of education to its latest, should introduce legislation by building common networks with the civil society and provide for the active implementation of such legislation, and should not erect barriers before women's playing a more active role in all areas, notably education, employment, and politics.

Misleading and manipulative news coverage that encourage violence and discrimination against women can be controlled and content focusing on gender equality can be promoted. As feminist reporting and journalism have their repercussions in information and documents in circulation, the public can have access to more trustworthy sources and news reports. An important problem in Turkey again lies in the state's attitude towards dissident media as is seen in the case of *Jinnews*,⁸ a Kurdish women's news agency, which has been subjected to numerous denial of access rulings by the courts.

Media outlets that have little regard for journalism and reporting ethics and principles have long dominated legacy media in Turkey. Such dominance also tallies with the rhetoric and stand of the political power. Thus, the language and perspective employed in news reports often incriminate women condescending of women's freedom of expression. Legacy media has been presenting news reports on femicide and violence against women as criminal cases rather than referring to their ideological facets reducing them to numeric data. Additionally, the media does not feature women in equal status and air/coverage time as it does with men. Men on TV, for instance, often resort to *mansplaining* against women participants.

Women employees in media outlets are subjected to mobbing on the sole grounds that they are women and forced to flexible and precarious employment especially during the pandemic. Legislative measures should thus be taken and implemented in order to prevent such inequality against women; all media employees should be trained in gender equality. Women's contact with women's organizations should be facilitated and necessary measures should be taken against arbitrary practices.

¹ İHD. "Statement on Turkey's Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention." 20 March 2021.

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- ² İHD. “Special Report: Enforced Statements, Interviews, Informant-Making and Abductions through Coercion and Threats.” 5 November 2020. <<https://ihd.org.tr/en/ihd-special-report-enforced-statements-interviews-informant-making-and-abductions-through-coercion-and-threats/>>
- ³ HDP. “Kadın Kayyım Raporu.” 7 March 2019. <<https://www.hdp.org.tr/tr/kadin-kayyim-raporumuz/12932/>> and “Seizure of Will and Realities on Trustees.” 24 February 2021. <<https://www.hdp.org.tr/en/seizure-of-will-and-realities-on-trustees/15113/>>
- ⁴ Front Line Defenders. “Turkey: Labor Rights Defenders.” 31 May 2021. <<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/eight-labour-rights-defenders-released-judicial-control-measures>>
- ⁵ UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. “Turkey: Stop mis-using the law to detain human rights defenders.” 9 June 2021. <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27152&LangID>>
- ⁶ The Coalition for Women in Journalism. “First Quarterly Report.” Cases in Spotlight: Turkey. <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57695ddc197aea6c1998b48c/t/608d66bd4eb3d75524928761/1619879619029/Q1+2021+REPORT-sikiştirildi.pdf>>
- ⁷ *Official Gazette*. 20 March 2021. <<https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2021/03/20210320-49.pdf>>
- ⁸ For instance, <<http://jinnews16.xyz>>