

## RESOLUTION ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN TURKEY

The deteriorating climate for free expression has reached a new low in Turkey - with a notable surge since the attempted coup of 15 July 2016 - with mounting harassment and intolerance of journalists, writers, intellectuals and academics. Large numbers are facing vague national security charges such as 'acquiring and divulging state secrets' or 'membership of, and administration of a terrorist organization'. Online expression is restricted which affects human rights and democracy activists in particular, while intolerance of intellectuals and opposition voices expressing opposing views to the government is unprecedented,

Alongside the legitimate investigations and detentions related to criminal conduct during the attempted coup, there is a profound concern that the authorities are using the state of emergency to further silence any and all critical voices in the country. As of 28 July, arrest warrants have been issued for 42 journalists (a full list is available [here](#)) in addition to 47 former employees of *Zaman* newspaper. Three news agencies, 16 TV channels, 23 radio stations, 45 papers, 15 magazines and 29 publishers have been ordered shut, including the pro-Kurdish *Ozgur Gundem*<sup>1</sup> paper on 16 August. The paper has long been harassed by the authorities.

Books are being banned and confiscated arbitrarily. In June 2016, some 53 titles<sup>2</sup> from Aram publishing House including novels and poetry books<sup>3</sup> were banned by the court in Diyarbakir and confiscated by military forces, while in Qoser military forces confiscated 88 titles from Ekin bookstore<sup>4</sup> without any decisions from court. In July 2016, at least 29 publishing houses were ordered closed in the wake of the coup attempt<sup>5</sup>.

Numerous laws and practices allow the prosecution of writers solely for their writings. As a result, writers, journalists, editors and publishers face continual pressure including harassment, lengthy prison terms and torture.

As of 23 August 2016<sup>6</sup>, at least 97 writers and journalists were detained or in prison, with scores of others facing trial, including many Kurdish writers and journalists who have been increasingly targeted since the ceasefire between the PKK and the government ended in August 2015. Many arrests are carried out arbitrarily, without following due process. Imprisoned writers are sometimes unable to get books to read, as increasing numbers of books are banned arbitrarily by prison authorities and restrictions are placed on the number of books a prisoner may hold<sup>7</sup>. (A full list of writers persecuted in Turkey in 2015 is available in PEN International's 2015 Case List, available [here](#).)

**In the light of this situation, the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, meeting at its 82nd World Congress in Ourense, Galicia (Spain), 26th September to 2nd October 2016, calls on the government of Turkey to:**

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/turkey-pen-protests-closure-of-ozgur-gundem-and-targeting-of-journalists/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://diyarname.com/news.php?Idx=22526>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.imctv.com.tr/53-kitap-hakkinda-toplatma-karari/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/haber/171299/qoserde-polisler-kitaplara-el-koydu>

<sup>5</sup> <http://turkyaybir.org.tr/basin-duyurusu-2/#.V7c-XfkrKUI>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/turkey-list-of-journalists-detained-charged-before-and-after-coup-attempt/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://turkyaybir.org.tr/wp-content/files\\_mf/1469516619YORHaziraning1516OZEL.pdf](http://turkyaybir.org.tr/wp-content/files_mf/1469516619YORHaziraning1516OZEL.pdf)

- Uphold freedom of expression, human rights and the rule of law during the state of emergency which was imposed in the wake of the attempted coup of 15 July 2016;
- Release all writers and journalists detained or on trial solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and end the practice of arbitrary arrests;
- Amend the problematic Anti-Terror law without delay, and drop all charges brought against writers and journalists under this law solely in connection with their peaceful freedom of expression;
- During the work for a new Constitution, review all relevant articles of the law with a view of bringing them into accord with international human rights standards, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and European Convention on Human Rights, to which Turkey is a state party;
- End the policy of arbitrarily banning books, and raiding publishing houses and bookstores to remove them;
- Review the policy on restricting prisoners' access to books to read while serving their sentences to ensure that detainees have the widest possible choice.