

TURKEY RIGHTS MONITOR



Issue 35 | February 15-21, 2021

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND ARREST

Throughout the week, prosecutors ordered the detention of at least 127 people over alleged links to the Gülen movement. In October 2020, a UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) [opinion](#) said that widespread or systematic imprisonment of individuals with alleged links to the group may amount to crimes against humanity. Solidarity with OTHERS has compiled a detailed [database](#) to monitor the Gülen-linked mass detentions since a failed coup in July 2016.

February 15: The police [detained](#) 718 people including HDP politicians on terrorism charges. The wave of detentions came a day after the government announced the killing of 13 Turkish nationals held hostage in northern Iraq by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

February 15: Five-year-old Kübra Kuzan [died](#) of cancer without being able to see her jailed father after authorities denied her father's request for the suspension of his prison sentence under the law on the execution of sentences, which stipulates that the sentences of prisoners whose first-degree relatives are seriously ill may be postponed for one year.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

No news has emerged of [Yusuf Bilge Tunç](#) and [Hüseyin Galip Küçüközyiğit](#), former public sector workers who were sacked from their jobs by decree-laws during the 2016-2018 state of emergency and who were reported missing respectively as of August 6, 2019 and December 29, 2020, in what appear to be the latest cases in a string of suspected [enforced disappearance](#) of government critics since 2016.

February 19: The police in Ankara allegedly [abducted](#) three leftist university students and abandoned them in distant parts of the city after threatening and beating them for a couple of hours.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

February 15: The police in Ankara [detained](#) a group of women after they attempted to stage a demonstration against a government plan for an all-female university.

February 17: UN special rapporteurs in a [joint letter](#) to the Turkish government on Feb. 11 expressed serious concern about Turkey's new terrorism financing legislation due to its provisions exceeding the scope of the law and targeting freedom of association in the country.

February 17: Van Governor's Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 15 days. Through consecutive extensions, the ban has been held uninterrupted in effect in the province since November 2016.

February 18: Hatay Governor's Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 15 days.

February 19: The police in İstanbul [detained](#) poet Çayan Okuducu for attending a demonstration in Siirt in 2014. Okuducu was released on probation the next day.

February 20: Mardin Governor's Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 15 days.

February 21: The police in İstanbul [detained](#) two people for attending Boğaziçi University demonstrations.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

February 15: An İstanbul court [handed down](#) suspended prison sentences to four journalists and human rights activists who stood trial on charges of terrorism for guest-editing the now-defunct Özgür Gündem newspaper and campaigning against efforts to censor it in 2016.

February 15: An Ankara court [sentenced](#) former high-ranking intelligence official Sabri Uzun to 11 months, 20 days in prison on charges of insulting the president on social media.

February 15: An İstanbul court [imposed](#) a monetary fine against prominent human rights defender Şebnem Korur Fincancı for insulting a public official, over a social media post about then-Prime Minister and current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2013.

February 15: Ankara prosecutors [launched](#) investigations into HDP lawmakers Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu and Hüda Kaya over their remarks criticizing a botched military operation in northern Iraq.

February 15: The police in Erzurum [detained](#) four people over their social media messages. The detainees were released two days later after their questioning.

February 15: The police in Şırnak briefly [detained](#) a man named Abdullah Yaman over his social media messages. Yaman was released the same day.

February 16: A prosecutor [indicted](#) journalists Adnan Bilen, Cemil Uğur, Şehriban Abi, Nazan Sala and Zeynep Durgut, seeking imprisonment on terrorism-related charges, over their coverage on the alleged torture of two Kurdish villagers at the hands of the soldiers in the eastern province of Van.

February 16: Several courts [blocked](#) access to 10 news websites between February 2 and 16, citing national security and public order reasons.

February 16: An İstanbul court [ruled](#) to block access to news reports about a local municipal urban transformation plan that was repealed by a court order.

February 17: An İstanbul prosecutor [demanded](#) prison sentences of up to four years, eight months for veteran actors Müjdat Gezen and Metin Akpınar who are standing trial on charges of insulting the president, over their comments during a TV program in 2018.

February 17: An Ankara court [ruled](#) to block access to news reports about a tweet posted by an academic involving a death threat to opposition MP Sezgin Tanrikulu.

February 18: A Şanlıurfa court [ruled](#) to arrest a man named Müslüm Abbas on the charge of spreading terrorist propaganda.

February 18: A journalists' association report [found](#) that one out of every four journalists was subjected to physical violence and half of them received threats in 2020.

February 18: The Constitutional Court [ordered](#) the government to pay TL 15,000 (€ 1,750) in damages to journalist Beyza Kural who was subjected to police brutality while covering a demonstration in İstanbul in 2015.

February 18: An İstanbul court [ruled](#) to block access to news stories about a criminal network set up by a high judiciary member, a former intelligence operative and a convicted drug lord.

February 19: The Supreme Court of Appeals [upheld](#) a prison sentence of two years, six months handed down to HDP MP Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu on charges of disseminating terrorist propaganda, over a social media message in August 2016.

February 19: An İstanbul court [ruled](#) to block access to news stories about former Finance Minister Berat Albayrak over the loss of \$130 billion in Central Bank reserves.

February 19: An İstanbul court [ruled](#) to block access to news stories about a satirical wanted poster designed by opposition youth over the disappearance of former Finance Minister Berat Albayrak since his resignation in November 2020.

February 19: An İstanbul court [ruled](#) to block access to a tweet and several news stories about the comments of opposition MP Faik Öztrak's comments on the disappearance of former Finance Minister Berat Albayrak.

February 19: Opposition MP Ali Mahir Başarır [said](#) based on Justice Ministry data that courts convicted 9,556 people on charges of insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, out of the 29,839 who stood trial

between 2014 when Erdoğan took office as president and 2019.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

February 15: An İstanbul court [handed down](#) a suspended prison sentence of six years, three months to human rights activist Eren Keskin who stood trial on charges of terrorism for guest-editing the now-defunct Özgür Gündem newspaper and campaigning against efforts to censor it in 2016.

February 15: An İstanbul court [imposed](#) a monetary fine against prominent human rights defender Şebnem Korur Fincancı for insulting a public official, over a social media post about then-Prime Minister and current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2013.

February 19: The Supreme Court of Appeals [upheld](#) a prison sentence of two years, six months handed down to HDP MP Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu on charges of disseminating terrorist propaganda, over a social media message in August 2016.

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE & RULE OF LAW

February 17: Leaked secret correspondence [revealed](#) that the Ministry of Justice asked prosecutors to isolate and closely monitor the communications of former high court judges who were disbarred and imprisoned on terror charges after the July 2016 coup attempt.

KURDISH MINORITY

February 15: The police [detained](#) 718 people including HDP politicians on terrorism charges. The wave of detentions came a day after the government announced the killing of 13 Turkish nationals held hostage in northern Iraq by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Most of the detainees were released on probation during the week.

February 15: An İstanbul court [handed down](#) suspended prison sentences to four journalists and human rights activists who stood trial on charges of terrorism for guest-editing Özgür Gündem, a now-defunct newspaper that had focused on Kurdish issues.

February 15: A Kars court [ruled](#) to arrest three people out of the six local HDP executives and associates who

were detained on Feb. 12. The remaining three were released on probation.

February 15: Ankara prosecutors [launched](#) investigations into HDP lawmakers Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu and Hüda Kaya over their remarks criticizing a botched military operation in northern Iraq.

February 16: A Kars court [ruled](#) to arrest three people, including local HDP executive Sevda Subaşı who were detained on Feb. 12.

February 16: A prosecutor [indicted](#) journalists Adnan Bilen, Cemil Uğur, Şehriban Abi, Nazan Sala and Zeynep Durgut, seeking imprisonment on terrorism-related charges, over their coverage on the alleged torture of two Kurdish villagers at the hands of the soldiers in the eastern province of Van.

February 16: Several courts [blocked](#) access to 10 news websites between February 2 and 16, including pro-Kurdish websites, citing national security and public order reasons.

February 16: A Kocaeli court [ruled](#) to release on probation 13 local HDP members who were detained on Feb. 12.

February 17: A Yalova court [ruled](#) to arrest five of the eight local HDP officials who were detained on Feb. 14 on terrorism-related charges, while releasing the remaining three on probation.

February 18: The authorities in Aydın [released](#) on probation 13 people, including local HDP executives, who were detained on Feb. 14. The police reportedly conducted a strip-search on the detainees.

February 18: A Mardin court [ruled](#) to arrest former HDP district co-chair Mehmet Selim Kılıç on terrorism-related charges.

February 19: The Supreme Court of Appeals [upheld](#) a prison sentence of two years, six months handed down to HDP MP Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu on charges of disseminating terrorist propaganda, over a social media message in August 2016.

February 19: Ankara prosecutors [prepared](#) summaries of proceedings for nine HDP lawmakers, seeking to lift their parliamentary immunities, for allegedly organizing a wave of protests in predominantly Kurdish cities in October 2014.

February 19: [Dilek Hatipoğlu](#), the former mayor of Hakkari who was removed from office by the Interior Ministry in 2015, attended the latest hearing of her trial with a black eye. She said she had been beaten by prison guards and subjected to strip-searches.

February 20: A Bitlis court [ruled](#) to arrest HDP city council member Ekrem Yalçın on terrorism-related charges. Previously, Yalçın was detained on Feb. 9 and released on probation three days later.

MILITARY OPERATIONS ABROAD

February 18: International Criminal Court Prosecutor [Fatou Bensouda](#) said she would make a decision regarding the Turkish-led settlements and population transfers in northern Cyprus before the end of her term on June 16.

MISTREATMENT OF CITIZENS ABROAD

February 19: İsmail Hakkı Pekin, a former intelligence official at the Turkish General Staff, inadvertently [revealed](#) while speaking on a TV program the possible role of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) in the killing of three Kurdish women in Paris in 2013.

PRISON CONDITIONS

February 16: [Ersoy Karamustafa](#), a former teacher arrested over alleged links to the Gülen movement, died in prison of Covid-19, less than two months before he was due to be released on parole. In April 2020, the Turkish parliament passed an early parole law to ease overcrowding in prison due to the pandemic, which excluded political prisoners.

February 18: Jailed writer and journalist [Ahmet Altan](#), 70, still has not been vaccinated against the coronavirus despite being among the priority groups set by the Health Ministry, according to his daughter's social media posts. The same day, the Justice Ministry released a [statement](#), announcing that the vaccination of prisoners have begun in line with Health Ministry guidelines.

February 19: A [letter](#) sent from a Tekirdağ prison by jailed lawyers Süleyman Gökten and Özgür Yılmaz revealed a number of problems about prison conditions, including extreme restrictions on tap water, lack of heating and denial of access to books.

February 19: Media reports [said](#) that a prison in Manisa was denying medication and treatment to inmate Ekim Polat who is suffering from heart disease.

TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

February 16: A prosecutor [indicted](#) journalists Adnan Bilen, Cemil Uğur, Şehriban Abi, Nazan Sala and Zeynep Durgut, seeking imprisonment on terrorism-related charges, over their coverage on the alleged torture of two Kurdish villagers at the hands of the soldiers in the eastern province of Van.

February 16: [Muhammed Ünal](#), a youth activist who was arrested on Feb. 7 and released on Feb. 12 after attending Boğaziçi University protests, revealed that he was subjected to psychological and physical violence during his detention.

February 17: Guards at an Antalya prison reportedly [assaulted](#) several inmates.

February 18: The police in Aydın [conducted](#) a strip-search on four local HDP executives in custody.

February 18: A [prison guard](#) in İstanbul who beat journalist Barış Pehlivan in March 2020, was let off with a warning by the prison administration, despite available video footage of the incident.

February 19: [Dilek Hatipoğlu](#), the former mayor of Hakkari who was removed from office by the Interior Ministry in 2015, attended the latest hearing of her trial with a black eye. She said she had been beaten by prison guards and subjected to strip-searches.

February 19: Ruling AKP deputy chairperson Özlem Zengin [described](#) the victims of strip-searches in prisons and detention centers as “dishonorable” for failing to immediately report such incidents to the authorities.

February 19: [Kadir Aktar](#), an 17-year-old minor who was on trial for alleged involvement in the killing of a police officer in İstanbul, lost his life in a juvenile prison. While the prison administration declared the cause of death as suicide, Aktar's lawyer said there was grounds for suspicion that he was tortured.