

# TURKEY RIGHTS MONITOR



Issue 32 | January 25-31, 2021

## ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

**January 26:** [Gökhan Güneş](#), a man who was reported missing on Jan. 20, returned home on his own after he was left blindfolded in İstanbul's Başakşehir district. He held a press conference later in the same day at the İstanbul branch of the Human Rights Association (İHD), telling of the illegal detainment and torture he was subjected to during the days he was missing.

**January 27:** The Human Rights Association [released](#) a statement, calling on the authorities to conduct an effective investigation into the disappearance of former public sector workers Yusuf Bilge Tunç and Hüseyin Galip Küçüközyiğit.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

**January 25:** The police in İstanbul [blocked](#) several demonstrations held to protest the enforced disappearance of Gökhan Güneş, detaining 11 people.

**January 25:** The police in Şanlıurfa briefly [detained](#) three people for hanging a banner on a building about the hunger strikes in prisons.

**January 25:** The police in Ankara briefly [detained](#) Mahmut Konuk, a purge victim demonstrating to demand to be reinstated to his job.

**January 26:** The Tunceli Governor's Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 30 days.

**January 27:** An Ankara court ruled to release [Acun Karadağ](#), a prominent rights activist and a teacher summarily dismissed from the public sector. Karadağ has been held for the last five months over her protests demanding reinstatement to her job. The court ruled to keep behind bars other activists such as Nazan Bozkurt,

Mehmet Dersulu, Alev Şahin and Armağan Özbaş. The activists were subjected to a [strip-search](#) upon return from their hearing.

**January 27:** The Şanlıurfa Governor's Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 30 days.

**January 28:** A Sinop court [sentenced](#) 37 environmental activists to a total of 42 years, nine months and 27 days in prison over their protests against the construction of a fossil fuel plant.

**January 29:** The police in İstanbul [detained](#) five university students over an exhibition featuring LGBT flags mixed with religious images. The students were later arrested and placed under a house arrest by a court. Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu announced the development by referring to the detainees as "LGBT deviants."

**January 29:** The police in Batman [blocked](#) a march organized by pro-Kurdish political groups, detaining 26 people.

**January 29:** The Hakkari Governor's Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 15 days.

**January 29:** The police in Artvin [blocked](#) an event held to commemorate the victim of an armed attack, briefly detaining three people. One person was injured on the head during the violent intervention.

**January 30:** The Gaziantep Governor's Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 15 days.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

**January 25:** The police in Diyarbakır [summoned](#) for a questioning 59-year-old illiterate woman Şükran Akboğa due to a social media message she allegedly posted.

**January 25:** Ankara prosecutors [launched](#) an investigation into Turkish-Cypriot journalist Ayşemden Akın for “insulting the Turkish state,” over her criticism of the Turkish ambassador to the northern part of Cyprus, which is recognized only by Ankara.

**January 25:** Broadcasting watchdog RTÜK [released](#) a statement warning that guests on TV programs “cannot be allowed to say whatever they want.”

**January 26:** An İstanbul court [sentenced](#) TV executive Osman Çalık to seven years, six months in prison on terrorism-related charges.

**January 26:** An İstanbul court [ruled](#) to block access to a column penned by journalist Murat Ağirel about the alleged lack of supervision over the expenditures of the state-run TRT broadcaster.

**January 28:** The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) released a yearly [report](#) which found that Turkey ranks first among the 47 Council of Europe member states in the number of ECtHR judgments concerning violations of freedom of expression in 2020.

**January 28:** The police in Batman [detained](#) seven local HDP politicians in house raids over their social media messages.

**January 28:** Marmara University [announced](#) that it is investigating a professor for mentioning the president’s name in an “inappropriate” way in exam questions.

**January 29:** A Van court [sentenced](#) local journalist Nahide Aslan to one year, six months in prison on terrorism-related charges.

**January 29:** Ankara prosecutors [indicted](#) main opposition CHP vice chair Gökçe Gökçen for allegedly libelling President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, over a booklet.

**January 29:** An Ankara court [ruled](#) to block access to blog entries about a man who shot dead his neighbor’s dog.

**January 29:** A Sakarya court [ruled](#) to block access to news stories about a wushu player who allegedly joined the same tournament as both a player and a referee.

## JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE & RULE OF LAW

**January 25:** [Murat Uçum](#), a senior legal adviser to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said in an interview that the judgments delivered by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) are not “binding on the merits.” Turkey has famously defied ECtHR orders for the release of Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtaş and civil society leader Osman Kavala.

**January 26:** A decision by the Supreme Court of Appeals (Yargıtay) [revealed](#) that the judges of one of the court’s chambers met with their counterparts at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to discuss cases involving alleged supporters of the Gülen movement. The ECtHR has been widely criticized in Turkey and across Europe for failing to take a principled stance with respect to cases originating from Turkey.

**January 28:** Media reports revealed that purged academic [Mehmet Altan](#)’s appeal to be reinstated to his job at the İstanbul University was rejected based on a document that does not actually exist. The decision was made by a commission set up by the Turkish government to review individual complaints related to the state of emergency measures. Despite strong criticism over flaws in its functioning, composition and review procedures, the commission was acknowledged by the European Court of Human Rights as a valid domestic remedy for those purged from the public sector during Turkey’s two-year-long state of emergency between 2016 and 2018.

**January 29:** An İstanbul prosecutor [demanded](#) a lesser sentence for a police officer who caused the death of 14-year-old Berkin Elvan during the 2013 Gezi Park protests.

## KURDISH MINORITY

**January 25:** The police in İstanbul [detained](#) local HDP executives Ercan Sağlam and Dilan Kılıç. Sağlam was arrested by a court later while Kılıç was released later in the day.

**January 28:** The police in Batman [detained](#) seven local HDP politicians in house raids over their social media messages.

**January 29:** The police in Batman [blocked](#) a march organized by pro-Kurdish political groups, detaining 26 people.

## OTHER MINORITIES

**January 26:** Five houses belonging to people from the Alevi religious minority were [marked](#) with red X's and the word "Alevi" in Yalova, increasing concerns among the Alevi community in the region.

**January 29:** The police in İstanbul [detained](#) five university students over an exhibition featuring LGBT flags mixed with religious images. The students were later arrested and placed under a house arrest by a court. Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu announced the development by referring to the detainees as "LGBT deviants."

## PRISON CONDITIONS

**January 28:** Miktađ Dođan, a 30-year-old inmate in pretrial detention suffering from a serious liver disease, said he was belatedly taken to the hospital and made to stay in a filthy quarantine cell upon return to prison, in a letter to the Turkish Parliament's Human Rights Committee.

**January 30:** Inmate [Kahraman Sezer](#) who was held in a Hatay prison reportedly lost his life behind bars due to Covid-19.

## REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

**January 26:** Syrian refugees hosted in a tent camp in Mersin were [cut off](#) from power supply by a local distributor amid harsh winter conditions.

**January 26:** Reports claimed that the Turkish authorities were [detaining](#) Uighur refugees for alleged ties to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and sending them to removal centers for deportation to China. The Chinese government recently moved to ratify an extradition treaty with Turkey that was signed in 2017, which led to fears that it could be used to target Uighurs living in Turkey.

**January 28:** A Syrian refugee in Mardin, identified only with initials [A.R.](#), who was summoned to a local immigration office for missing documentation, was coerced to become an informant for the authorities by two people who introduced themselves as intelligence operatives. A.R. has filed a complaint about the incident.

## TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

**January 27:** The sister of an inmate held in a [Bolu prison](#) said that the prison administration has intensified psychological and physical violence against prisoners.

**January 27:** Imprisoned human rights activists Nazan Bozkurt, Alev Şahin, Mehmet Dersulu and Acun Karadağ were subjected to a [strip-search](#) upon return from their hearing at an Ankara court.

**January 28:** Reports revealed that journalist [Mehmet Aslan](#), who was arrested on Jan. 5 in Antalya, was subjected to a strip-search at an Antalya prison.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

**January 27:** A Diyarbakır court [ruled](#) to arrest Ayşe Gökkan, a spokesperson for a women's rights group.

**January 28:** [Oğuzhan Asiltürk](#), a right-wing politician and an executive for the Felicity Party (SP) claimed that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will withdraw Turkey from the İstanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty designed to prevent violence and domestic abuse against women.

**January 28:** An İstanbul court [ruled](#) to arrest women's rights activist Zeynep Ölbeci.