

TURKEY RIGHTS MONITOR



Special Issue 1 | Turkey Tribunal

Turkey Tribunal, a civil society-led people's tribunal initiated by a group of Belgian jurists at the Van Steenbrugge Advocaten law firm, convened in Geneva between September 20 and 24 to review and deliver judgment on recent human rights violations in Turkey.

The [panel of judges](#) consisted of former European Court of Human Rights judges and notable human rights judges and jurists from around the world.

The tribunal received reports and heard witness testimonies on [several questions](#) that it aimed to address.

We have dedicated this special issue of Turkey Rights Monitor to the tribunal because we believe that the event has served as the most significant medium to date for exposing to the international public opinion in all clarity the abysmal state of human rights in Turkey in recent years.

Below you can find highlights from several thematic sessions of the tribunal as well as a summary of the tribunal's verdict on each issue.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

On September 21, the tribunal [heard](#) the testimonies of Mustafa Özben, a man who was reported missing in Ankara in May 2017, and Sezin Uçar, the lawyer for Gökhan Güneş who was briefly abducted in İstanbul in January 2021. The witnesses explained the details of the incidents of abduction by state agents and the unofficial detention during which the victims were interrogated under torture.

The tribunal also [heard](#) the presentation of rapporteur Johan Heymans about enforced disappearances in

Turkey. Heymans [announced](#) that his law firm is preparing to file a complaint with the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) that includes evidence of abductions carried out by Turkish officials in countries that ratified the treaty that established the ICC.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

On September 21, the tribunal [heard](#) the testimonies of Meltem Oktay and Cevheri Güven, two journalists who were forced to flee the country as a result of a government crackdown on the media.

The panel of judges also [heard](#) the presentation of rapporteur Philippe Leruth about his report on the state of press freedom in Turkey.

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE & RULE OF LAW

On September 22, the tribunal [heard](#) rapporteur Emre Turkut present a report titled "Impunity in Turkey Today," which claimed that impunity has become the norm for cases concerning Turkish officials involved in human rights violations.

On the same day, the tribunal [heard](#) rapporteur Luca Perilli present a report on Turkey's judiciary that claimed the coup attempt was an invaluable opportunity for Ankara to implement wide-ranging purges of an independent judiciary.

TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

On September 20, the tribunal [heard](#) the testimonies of Mehmet Alp and Erhan Doğan, two victims of torture who explained their brutal detention in Turkey.

The panel of judges also heard rapporteur Eric Sottas present his report titled “Torture in Turkey Today.”

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

On September 23, the tribunal [heard](#) rapporteur Johan Vande Lanotte present his report titled “Crimes Against Humanity under the Rome Statute in Turkey Today,” which claimed that recent cases of enforced disappearance and torture in Turkey amount to crimes against humanity.

CONCLUDING OPINION

In its [concluding opinion](#) announced on September 24, the tribunal made the following observations:

On Enforced Disappearances:

The tribunal said that abductions are a part of state action towards perceived political opponents and that allegations of abductions are not properly investigated.

On Freedom of Expression and Media:

The tribunal said that the repression against the press and freedom of expression points to a larger policy of the state to silence critical voices and limit people’s access to information.

On Impunity:

The tribunal said that there has been a persistent and prevailing culture of impunity in Turkey since 1980, which has reached unprecedented levels in recent years, particularly since the attempted coup d’état of July 2016.

On Judicial Independence:

The tribunal expressed opinion that access to justice and thus the protection of fundamental human rights in the current state of the judicial system in Turkey is illusory.

On Torture and Ill-Treatment:

The tribunal said that there is a systematic and organized use of torture in Turkey, particularly against people perceived to be linked with or supportive of the Kurdish people and the Gülen movement, as well as people suspected of ordinary crimes.

On Crimes Against Humanity:

The tribunal said that the acts of torture and enforced disappearance committed in Turkey could amount to crimes against humanity.