



The Law Society
of England and Wales



Addressing attacks on lawyers and the rule of law in Turkey: a profession on trial

4th of October 2024 | 16:00-17:00 (CET) | Meeting room 4 - Opera

For years, lawyers in Turkey have been unable to fulfil their professional duties effectively, due to external pressure and improper interference. Attacks on lawyers range from threats and surveillance to judicial harassment, including arbitrary (mass) arrest, detention, and criminal prosecution. Prosecution of lawyers is frequently the direct consequence of the identification of lawyers with their clients or their clients causes. In many cases, lawyers who are targeted, represent people who are considered 'enemies of the state', such as people who are prosecuted under counter-terrorism laws, or who have been critical of the government's policies or behaviour, including journalists, opposition leaders or members of minority groups.

The sustained and systematic attacks on lawyers and the improper interferences with their legitimate work have created a climate in which lawyers eventually refuse to represent clients connected to politically sensitive or controversial issues out of fear of becoming the target of acts of harassment. This severely compromises the universal right to effective legal representation and access to justice for all.

In addition to the persecution of individual lawyers, emergency decree laws have closed down dozens of lawyers' associations all over the country. More recently, bar associations have also been targeted. Over the years, prominent bar associations have played an increasingly important role in documenting human rights abuses and commenting on the erosion of the rule of law and fair trial rights in Turkey. Several criminal cases were launched against critical Bar Associations. Moreover, amendments to Turkey's Attorneyship Law aiming to reform Bar Associations in Turkey, are perceived as an attempt to fragment professional bodies and use information about political affiliation for potential persecution of their members.

Side event description

During this side event, speakers will delve into the difficulties lawyers in Turkey face when conducting their professional activities. They will consider the implications of the increasing rights violations of lawyers in Turkey; the threats to the independence of bar associations in Turkey; and the importance of persistent attention and pressure from governments on both multilateral and bilateral levels, as well as the role played by civil society solidarity movements. Last, the speakers will offer recommendations and suggestions for the OSCE members and civil society representatives on how to address the situation of lawyers in Turkey, and what measures to take to enable them to play their important role as essential agents of the administration of justice.

Co-sponsored by: The Law Society of England and Wales, the International Commission of Jurists, and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute.

Speakers

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| Kerem Altıparmak | International Commission of Jurists, lawyer at Ankara Bar Association |
| Emma Sinclair-Webb | Human Rights Watch, Associate Director and Turkey Director |
| Tony Fisher | Chair of the Human Rights Committee, Law Society of England and Wales |

Moderated by Tara Fiechter, Lawyers for Lawyers, Programme Officer