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PETITION TO THE PERMANENT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Urgent appeal to the Dutch Government concerning the recent developments in Turkey

After a truce of more than two years and negotiations between the Turkish government and the Kurdish PKK, since July 2015 the fighting has flared up again. In recent months, dozens of civilians, soldiers and PKK fighters have been killed during the fighting. In Turkish cities the tension between the Turkish and Kurdish civilians is growing. Also in European cities the tension is increasing. In the Netherlands, the Kurdish Association offices in both Amsterdam and Rotterdam were attacked at the beginning of September.

The rising violence is endangering the fragile peace process between the Turkish government and the Kurdish minority. A sustainable solution to this nearly century old problem is again being pushed onto the back burner. In our view, this poses a serious threat to the Turkish Rule of law.

We therefore ask the Dutch government to strongly urge the Turkish government to:

- Set up an independent and impartial investigation into the recent events whereby deaths have occurred at the hands of the police and the security services.
- Ensure that the police and the security services do not use disproportionate violence in their actions and that they respect human rights.
- Guarantee the principles of a democratic Rule of Law system, so that the judiciary, prosecutors and lawyers can exercise their duties independently.

BACKGROUND

In the last months, the Turkish government has declared a state of emergency in several towns in southeast Turkey and set a curfew. Most recently this has happened in Cizre, Diyarbakir and Nusaybin.

In Cizre, a town with around 100,000 inhabitants, citizens were unable to leave their homes between 4 and 12 September. At the same time the electricity and water supplies

were shut off and mobile phone connections were blocked. Furthermore, all the roads to Cizre were closed. Eyewitnesses stated that, after the lifting of state of emergency on September 12, 2015, civilians were shot by snipers and that it was impossible to bring the wounded to hospital or bury the dead.

The Social Democratic People's Party HDP defends the rights of minorities and works with the Kurdish regional Democratic Party DBP. A delegation from the HDP stated on 12 September that 23 civilians were killed during the fighting in Cizre. According to human rights organizations and lawyers, among the victims were children and elderly people. According to NOS correspondent Lucas Waagmeester, large parts of the city look like a badly battered war zone. "In some places, entire rows of houses have been damaged. Everywhere you see shell and bullet holes."

In a number of cities in western Turkey there are major tensions between Turks and Kurds. Supporters of the ruling AKP party have attacked and abused Kurdish civilians. More than 300 offices of the HDP-party have been attacked.

Hundreds of people, including journalists, lawyers, judges and prosecutors, have again been arrested and justice has become impossible. Courts with special powers, which had been abolished in February 2014, have now been reinstated as "specialized courts". Judges and prosecutors have been transferred.

Lawyers are systematically prevented from exercising their profession. Deniz Sürgüt, a member of the Lawyers Association for Freedom, was arrested on 8 August, in the town of Idil where special units of the police force conducted a mass arrest. Sürgüt went to Idil to see with his own eyes how the police conducted the arrests. Relatives of those arrested had complained that their children had been severely mistreated and tortured by members of the SWAT team. Sürgüt wanted to denounce this to the authorities, but was also arrested¹.

Attorney Ebru Timtik of progressive advocacy organization CHD was arrested on 22 September, while she was collecting signatures for a petition in support of one of her clients whose passport was confiscated².

On 6 and 7 September, the national newspaper "Hürriyet" was the target of attacks by AKP sympathizers. The government blocked several news websites. On 10 September, Dutch journalist Frédérique Geerdink was expelled from Turkey after she had been detained for two days. According to her lawyer R. Demir, Geerdink was accused of "helping a terrorist organization".

On 14 September, Turkish police raided the magazine *Nokta* because it had put an edited selfie of President Erdoğan on its cover. Editor Murat Çapan was arrested.

¹ For more information on the arrest of Deniz Sürgüt, please visit:
<https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/europe/turkey/turkey-rights-groups-strongly-condemn-escalating-violence-and-human>
<http://www.advocatenvooradvocaten.nl/11120/turkey-lawyer-arrested-while-monitoring-mass-arrest/?lang=nl>

² For more information on the arrest of Ebru Timtik, please visit:
http://www.todayszaman.com/national_lawyers-manhandled-by-police-during-demonstration-at-courtthouse_399872.html <http://www.advocatenvooradvocaten.nl/11125/turkey-arrest-of-lawyer/?lang=nl>

The Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet reported recently that Turk Telecom censors their website and as a result no public access to the website www.cumhuriyet.com.tr is possible

Freedom of expression in Turkey is under severe threat. Every year, hundreds of journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders, political activists and many others have to appear in court because they voiced their opinion.

Judges are also concerned. "It would appear that the independent administration of justice and legal protection are at stake", said Vice-President C. Regnard of the International Association of Judges on 4 September 2015 prior to a meeting of judges in Turkey.

Fair Trial Watch <http://www.fairtrialwatch.org>
Lawyers for Lawyers www.lawyersforlawyers.org

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