

# THE İMRALI POST

YOU HEARD HIS NAME. LEARN HIS STORY. DEMAND HIS FREEDOM.

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# Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan

## Three patriots from Germany take over Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan Vigil in Strasbourg

ANF | STRASBOURG | 5 JULY 2023

The Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan Vigil was launched in Strasbourg on 25 June 2012 to ensure the physical freedom of the Kurdish People’s Leader and to end the isolation imposed on him.

This week, the 576th, three patriots from Germany took over the vigil. Every week a new group of people take over the vigil, held where the most important European institutions are located.

The group includes Fahreddin Zeray, Fettah Cirit, Mahmut Ağırman.

Speaking on behalf of the activists, group spokesperson Fahrettin Zeray said: “We have come to reclaim the freedom of our Leader. We have known nothing about him for almost two years. We call on Kurdish institutions to act and support the demand for freedom and the lifting of isolation.”

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## Families of İmralı prisoners apply for a visit

ANF | 7 JULY 2023

There has been no news from Kurdish people’s leader Abdullah Öcalan for over two years and there is absolute isolation imposed on him.

Abdullah Öcalan’s brother Mehmet Öcalan and his guardian Mazlum Dinç, Ömer Hayri Konar’s brother Ali Konar, Hamili Yıldırım’s brother Polat Yıldırım and Veysi Aktaş’s sister Melihe Çetin applied to the Bursa Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office to visit their relatives.

Families also applied to the Directorate of İmralı F Type High Security Closed Penal Institution through the Bursa Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office.

Lawyers are requesting to meet with Kurdish people’s leader Abdullah Öcalan twice a week. However, applications for visits are systematically left unanswered. In some cases, months later, lawyers are informed that disciplinary action has been taken against the Kurdish people’s leader and therefore no visit can be granted.

In a statement on May 2, 2023, Asrın Law Office said: “We have not heard anything from Öcalan since 25 March 2021. Despite all the requests and efforts of his lawyers and his relatives, we are not aware of the living conditions and state of health of Öcalan and our three other clients on İmralı. This situation worries us and the whole society.”

A sham debate emerged in Turkey recently, speculating about talks with Abdullah Öcalan in the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14. The Asrın Law Office, which represents Öcalan and his three fellow prisoners on the prison island, assessed these rumours as manipulation, saying: “We have to emphasise again that we have not heard anything from Öcalan since 25 March 2021. Despite all the requests and efforts of his lawyers and his relatives, we are not aware of the living conditions and state of health of Öcalan and our three other clients on İmralı. This situation worries us and the whole society.”

The statement by Asrın Law Office pointed out that: “During the election campaign, the political centres are engaged in a propaganda race around Öcalan. Under these circumstances, we would like to inform the

whole society that the lack of news and the strict isolation conditions continue and that all these discussions are going on without Öcalan's knowledge, contribution and participation. What is right and should be done is to give Öcalan the opportunity to meet with his lawyers immediately. The law and minimum ethics also require this. Under these conditions, where Öcalan has no opportunity to express himself, we don't think speculative discussions that would mean ignoring or blocking out the reality of isolation and lack of news are right."

In its statement published on May 2 in connection with the talks in question on Imrali, the Asrin Law Office said:

- We have not received any messages from Öcalan and our three other clients after 25 March 2021, when a telephone conversation with his brother was interrupted and could not be continued. We do not know the reason for this interruption.
- We have no information about the detention conditions, the treatment and the state of health of our clients on Imrali.
- According to Article 66/3 of Law No. 5275, convicts have the right "to make immediate use of the prison's telephone and fax facilities in the event of the death, serious illness, epidemic disease or natural disaster of their heirs, descendants, spouses and siblings". Nevertheless, Öcalan and our other clients were deprived of this right even in the case of death, let alone illness, of their family members, and this prohibition was not relaxed even during the 6 February earthquakes.
- Öcalan could only use a single-channel radio for 14 years and only had access to television, which is available to all prisoners, in 2013. However, as a report from May 2018 shows, TV channels were restricted, and newspapers were delivered after a delay of 40 days.
- Öcalan was held in solitary confinement in the island prison for ten years and nine months from 16 February 1999 to 17 November 2009, after which five more of our clients were transferred to Imrali. Although these prisoners were later exchanged, as outlined in the 2016 and 2019 CPT (Committee for the Prevention of Torture) reports, our clients could only meet for six hours a week and spend the rest of the time alone in their cells.

### **Concerns increased after the CPT visit to Imrali**

Concerns over the situation of the Kurdish people's leader increased after the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited Turkey on September 20-29, 2022. In a statement on 3 October, the CPT announced that Imralı F Type High Security Prison was among the institutions it visited.

However, Asrin Law Office reported that during the CPT visit, there was no meeting with Abdullah Öcalan, and that this increased their concerns. Asrin Law Office said on 29 November: "We have heard that Mr. Öcalan did not see the CPT delegation during its visit to Imrali Island in September 2022."

## Conditions of extraordinary isolation

The İmralı F Type High Security Closed Prison was built specifically for Abdullah Öcalan in February 1999 and has since been operated based on a special status and through special practices.

Under the so-called aggravated execution regime, Abdullah Öcalan and his fellow prisoners, Hamili Yildirim, Ömer Hayri Konar and Veysi Aktaş, have been held under conditions of extraordinary isolation for a long time, 24 years in terms of Öcalan and eight years each in terms of other inmates.

Despite all their attempts, lawyers from the Istanbul-based Asrın Law Office, which represents Abdullah Öcalan and his three fellow prisoners, have not been able to receive even a single sign of life from their clients since 25 March 2021. They could not obtain any information regarding their health status, their detention conditions, their legal situation in 2022. It has been 23 months that their clients have not been heard from in any way.

## Öcalan held in a single cell since 1999

According to the [“2022 Annual Assessment Report on Rights Violations and the Current Conditions in İmralı Island Prison”](#) released by Asrın Law Office on 15 February 2023, Abdullah Öcalan has been held in a single cell in İmralı Island Prison since 15 February 1999. For the first ten years, he was the only prisoner in the island prison. In November 2009, new cells were added to the prison and five other prisoners were brought in. Nevertheless, Öcalan continued to be kept in solitary confinement 23 hours a day on weekdays and 24 hours a day on weekends.

Until 2011, Öcalan’s right to see his lawyers was limited to one hour one day a week, but in fact, he was constantly prevented from availing himself of this limited right, with the authorities alleging the pretext of “adverse weather conditions” or a “technical defect” of the coaster going to the island. In the twelve years since 27 July 2011, he has only been able to see his lawyer five times, between May and August 2019. The last of these five meetings took place on 7 August 2019.

Since 2014, Öcalan has received five visits from family members. His brother’s visit to the prison on 3 March 2020 marks Öcalan’s last direct contact with his family. Also, in 24 years, he communicated with the outside world via telephone on only two occasions (on 27 April 2020 and 25 March 2021). During the last phone call on 25 March 2021, the connection was lost after only two minutes and could not be restored. Öcalan has not been heard from since.

## Incommunicado detention

The report by Asrın stated that their clients’ situation was described as a form of “incommunicado” detention by the CPT in its report of 5 August 2020 (paras. 48 and 49). The CPT emphasized that such a state of affairs was unacceptable, urging the Turkish authorities to end it as soon as possible. “Incommunicado” detention means that the detainee or convict is completely prevented from any contact with the outside world and therefore cannot communicate with anyone, including his/her family, friends, and lawyers.

The “incommunicado” detention continued without interruption in 2022 despite lawyers’ weekly applications to the authorities in which they requested for the families and lawyers to be allowed to visit the prison. From 25 March 2021, the last date of contact with Imrali, until the end of 2022, a total of 238 applications for lawyer visits and another 79 applications for family/guardian visits were made. These applications were left without any response. Likewise, lawyers did not receive any letters, telegrams, or faxes from their clients during this period; nor was there any contact via phone.

### **Restrictions through fabricated decisions**

“After we applied to different international mechanisms, we learned from the government’s responses that our clients’ right to communicate via phone had been restricted for six months by decisions of the prison’s Management and Supervisory Board dated 18 October 2021, 30 March 2022, 9 May 2022 and 9 June 2022, respectively. These restriction orders were not communicated to the lawyers; the procedures were carried out secretly, bypassing the lawyers. Thus, it was understood that our clients’ right to communicate via phone is subject to periodic restrictions through fabricated decisions that are issued once every six months.

Moreover, we have not received any response to the numerous letters sent to our clients at regular intervals throughout the year. It is not known whether these letters were delivered to their addressees at all. In turn, we have also not received any letters, telegrams or faxes written by our clients in 2022.

In addition, the de facto and unlawful bans on family and lawyer visits that have been in place for many years have been maintained systematically and without cease so that not a single family or lawyer visit could take place in 2022. In this respect, 2022 was marked by the absolute impossibility of establishing any contact with our clients in İmralı Island Prison.”

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## Prisons in Turkey

**KCK: The KDP is responsible for the health and safety of Dağ and Er**

ANF | BEHDINAN | 1 JULY 2023

Mazlum Dağ and Abdurrahman Er, who were arrested and sentenced to death by the KDP for allegedly killing an MIT member, have been subjected to serious violations of their rights since the day they were imprisoned.

The prisoners, who went on hunger strike many times to protest the violations they had been subjected to, went on hunger strike on 18 May to reject the imposition of the prison uniform. While the prisoners are kept in solitary cells, there are reports that their health conditions are getting worse.

The KCK Foreign Relations Committee said in a written statement that the two Kurds have been kept in prison for five years and added: “The government in South Kurdistan, sentenced these two Kurdish youths to death in order to fulfil the demands of the occupying Turkish state. The only crime of these young people is that they punish a gang leader of the Turkish terror network in South Kurdistan. Handing out the death penalty to two Kurdish youths is far from Kurdishness, patriotism and humanity.”

The KCK continued: “South Kurdistan is full of security cameras recording all activity. MIT agents slaughter the revolutionaries in the streets and in their workplaces during the day, yet the security forces do not catch them and they easily escape. This shows that the KDP sees the shedding of Kurdish blood by the MIT as permissible. On the other hand, two patriotic Kurdish youths can even be sentenced to death. If death sentences are to be given, they should be given to former Baathists, ISIS members and undersecretaries who have a finger in the blood of hundreds of thousands of innocent Kurds. However, far from being punished, they are protected by the KDP. The most valuable places and lands in South Kurdistan are allocated to them. They build their own projects; they mock the historical memory of the people every day.”

Drawing attention to the torture and ill-treatment of Dağ and Er, the KCK stated: “Not content with the death penalty, both Kurds are placed under harsh surveillance and subjected to physical and psychological torture and oppression. All these torture are practices imposed by the Turkish state against Kurdish prisoners. This is a way of breaking their will, humiliating, killing and persecuting them. The highest level of this policy was implemented on Kurds and freedom fighters in Diyarbakır Prison in the 1980s. Mazlum Doğan, Kemal Pir and Sakine Cansız in Diyarbakır Prison showed great resistance against this policy. From the Xelan prison to the Akre and Hewler prisons, the KDP applies this mentality and policy against patriots and revolutionaries. From the torture and murder of Said Elçi to Süleyman Muini and hundreds of others, there are examples of how the KDP did whatever the invaders wanted.”

The KCK committee continued: “Today, Mazlum Dağ and Abdurahman Er are tortured and oppressed. Dağ and Er are on hunger strike for the third time to protest this repression. The previous two times, the KDP promised to fulfil their demands and the protest ended. Unfortunately, the KDP did not keep its promises and did not fulfil the demands. On the contrary, it increased the pressure. For this reason, the new hunger strike has been carried out for 44 days. With each passing day, the health conditions of the two men deteriorated. Despite all the calls from families and organizations, the KDP persists in its policy of oppression and torture, which seriously threatens their lives.

We hereby announce that the KDP is responsible for the life and health of Mazlum Dağ and Abdurahman Er. This policy of oppression and the requests by the invading Turkish state regarding these two young people must be ended as soon as possible before things get worse. We call on all human rights institutions, intellectuals, political figures, patriots, all political and Kurdish forces in Iraq and Kurdistan to take action against the policies and practices carried out by the KDP.”

## New violations of rights in Bodrum S-Type Prison

ANF | BODRUM | 1 JULY 2023

The AKP-MHP government, which used the Covid pandemic as an excuse to put pressure on political prisoners and stripping them of all their rights, is now trying to put pressure on them by using the economic crisis as an excuse.

The Ministry of Justice, which didn't allow books and newspapers in Muğla/Bodrum S Type Prison, started to apply different pressure methods.

The four-course meals were reduced to two. Objections to meals without vitamins and protein are rejected by the prison authorities, who said that "there is a policy of austerity due to the economic crisis, there is nothing to be done".

### Ill prisoners are not treated

According to the information received by ANF from political prisoners themselves, ill prisoner Gürbüz Topçu needs to be treated in Istanbul or Ankara. Kutbettin Menteş, who is suffering from hypertension, is kept in solitary confinement. Despite all their requests, the prisoners were not taken to a triple cell. Liver cancer Ali Haydar Ildiz is also not receiving treatment.

Newly arrived political prisoners are also under pressure to move to 'independent wards'. Political prisoners who refuse are left to the wards after being strip searched. Prisoners called on everyone to show sensitivity.

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## Prisoner Ecer talks about the violations of rights in Espiye prison

ANF | MARDIN | 4 JULY 2023

Abdullah Ecer (52) is a prisoner in Giresun Espiye L Type Closed jail. Talking to his wife, Neval Ecer, about the violations of rights in prison, he said that many prisoners are being prevented from being released even though they have served their sentence if they don't prove they feel "remorse".

Ecer said that the prisoners are subjected to intra-oral searches during hospital referrals and added that even basic things, like a tea samovar are not given. Ecer said: "We are subjected to inhumane practices. We want a human rights delegation to closely monitor the violations of human rights going on here."

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## Prisoner Asım Demir not released despite serving his full sentence

ANF | VAN | 5 JULY 2023

Asım Demir (66) is in Giresun Espiye L Type Closed Prison. He was due to be released having served his sentence. Yet, the Prison Administration and Observation Board postponed Demir's release for three months for the second time, saying that he didn't show "remorse".

Asım Demir was sentenced to life imprisonment by the State Security Court in 1992 after 40 days of detention on charges of "destroying the unity and integrity of the state". After being held for two years in Muş, 13 years in Antep, 5 years in Midyat and 8 years in Ordu, Demir was deported to Giresun Espiye L Type Prison in 2021.

Demir's release was postponed for three months, first in March and then in June, by the decision of the Prison Administration and Monitoring Board, because he didn't show "remorse".

His wife, Hediye Demir, said that her husband was subjected to heavy pressure from the prison administration and added that it was unfair that he was not released. "This unlawfulness must end as soon as possible. He served 30 years in prison. He served his sentence. The imposition of showing remorse is against human dignity. All prisoners must be released."

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## Kurdish writer Yaşar Aslan released after 30 years in prison

ANF | MARDIN | 5 JULY 2023

After spending more than three decades in Turkish prisons, the Kurdish writer Yaşar Aslan has been welcomed by hundreds of people in his town, Mardin (Mêrdîn). The now 50-year-old was arrested in Nusaybin (Nisêbîn) in early 1993, accused of "separatism" and sentenced to life imprisonment by the State Security Court in Diyarbakir (Amed). After thirty years and six months in prison, he was released on Monday from Tekirdağ 2 F-type detention center in western Turkey and arrived in Mardin on Tuesday.

Hundreds of people were waiting at the airport with flowers, including members of the prisoner aid association MED-TUHADFED and the "Peace Mothers" initiative. Green Left Party MP for Mardin Beritan Güneş, was also at the airport.

**"Our hope was stronger than outside"**

Aslan thanked for the overwhelming reception and gave a short speech underlining the poor prison conditions and the prisoners' expectations of civil society. "There are many problems in the prisons and our

comrades there have great expectations of you. There are no legal standards, and the prisoners' lives are decided arbitrarily. At the moment, people often speak of an old and a new Turkey, but we were oppressed in the past and we are oppressed in the new Turkey too. We have always experienced oppression. But inside we at least spoke up and expressed our feelings. Outside, people can't even do that anymore. Our hopes and our demands were stronger than those of the people outside. We must increase hope and we must strengthen our resistance. In prison, you are at the mercy of state violence, but there is resistance."

Aslan added: "Inside, they can take you anywhere at any time, but the people there defend their thoughts, they protect their hearts and minds. It should be learned from. If there is such resistance between four walls today, the resistance outside could be much bigger and better."

Yaşar Aslan wrote the books "Rengbej" and "Sergovend" in prison.

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## Mazlum Dağ and Abdurrahman Er enter 50th day of hunger strike

ANF | HEWLER | 6 JULY 2023

The hunger strike launched by Mazlum Dağ and Abdurrahman Er, prisoners held by the KDP, against rights violations in Hewler jail continues.

Dağ and Er want the imposition of arbitrary searches, physical violence, insults and the compulsory of wearing prison uniforms to end.

The hunger strike action launched by the two names on 18 May has reached its 50th day.

Mazlum Dağ and Abdurrahman Er are accused of shooting dead the Turkish vice-consul and intelligence officer Osman Köse and two other people in a luxury restaurant in Hewlêr (Erbil), the capital of the South Kurdistan autonomous region, on 17 July 2019. In February 2020, Dağ and Er were sentenced to death by the 2nd Criminal Court in Hewlêr in a show trial under pressure from Turkey. Immediately following the trial, the two activists were placed in a prison cell next to ISIS jihadists. On 22 September 2020, the death sentences were confirmed by the Court of Cassation.

The two Kurdish prisoners have been constantly subjected to serious rights violations since the day they were imprisoned. The prisoners, who have repeatedly gone on hunger strikes so far in response to oppression and violations, started an indefinite hunger strike on 18 May to protest the ongoing violations, specifically the imposition of uniform dress. The health condition of the two Kurdish prisoners is deteriorating on the 45th day of the hunger strike.

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## Books in Kurdish not given to prisoners in Sincan No. 1 High Security jail

ANF | ANKARA | 7 JULY 2023

Kurdish books sent to the detainees in Sincan No. 1 High Security Prison were not received. Writer Ozan Alpkaya, who was sentenced to 29 years in prison after he was arrested in Amed in 2008 and has been held in Sincan No. 1 High Security Prison for nearly 2 years, said that 17 Kurdish books sent to him have been confiscated so far.

### Translator money wanted

Answering ANF questions about the subject through his family, Alpkaya said: “We have discussed this issue with the prison administration many times. In the past months, we asked them why they don’t give us Kurdish books. They didn’t answer. When we ask them again, they say that the Prison Education Commission can only examine the Turkish books sent and that, if we wanted Kurdish books sent to us, we should write two petitions, one for a translator of the Kurdish books and the other to confirm that the translator’s money will be deducted from our account after the translator reads and approves the Kurdish books sent. They say that they will not give us books if we don’t agree with these two conditions.”

### Application to the European Court of Human Rights

Noting that he submitted the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), Alpkaya said: “I applied to the Constitutional Court (AYM), but it rejected the application. This time we applied to the ECHR. Prisoners in other jails had experienced the same problem before and applied to the ECHR, which saw this situation as a violation of rights.”

Alpkaya said: “Today, what happens in all prisons in Turkey is almost the same. We don’t need an interpreter. Kurdish is the mother tongue of Kurds and it is a crime to prevent Kurds from reading and writing Kurdish. There is no such thing in any law in the world.”

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## Military aggression and occupation

## YJA Star guerrillas strike the Turkish army in memory of Zilan

ANF | BEHDINAN | 1 JULY 2023

In a statement about the war in the guerrilla-held Medya Defence Zones in southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq), the press centre of the People's Defence Forces (HPG) said that guerrillas from the Free Women's Troops (YJA Star) carried out several attacks on Turkish positions in the past two days to mark the "Day of Self-Sacrifice" on 30 June. The actions were carried out in memory of Zilan (Zeynep Kınacı) who blew herself up on 30 June 1996 on her own initiative against the Turkish army in the province of Dersim in northern Kurdistan.

Regarding the details of the actions in the Zap and Xakurke regions, as well as the continued attacks by the Turkish army on the guerrillas, HPG provided the following information:

In the Girê FM resistance area in the western Zap region, a radar system installed by the Turkish army was destroyed by the guerrillas on 29 June. When the occupation forces started to move, they were struck with heavy weapons. The next day, YJA Star mobile units targeted Turkish positions twice with heavy weapons and one howitzer position was completely destroyed.

In Xakurke, a Turkish position on Girê Koordinê was shelled by guerrillas with heavy weapons on Thursday. The position was destroyed, one soldier was killed, four other soldiers suffered injuries. In another action, a mobile unit of YJA Star hit a Turkish army position at Girê Şehîd Axîn.

The Turkish army carried out 14 airstrikes with fighter jets on guerrilla areas on 29 June. The western Zap region, Girê Hekarî in Metîna, Gundê Çemrobotkî and Xêrê in Gare as well as Sinînê and Ava Lolanê in Xakurke were affected.

In the past two days, a total of 336 Turkish attacks with howitzers, tanks and heavy weapons were carried out in the Zap, Metîna and Xakurke regions. In the resistance area of Sîda in the Zap region, the Turkish army continued to try to destroy the guerrillas' defence tunnels.

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## 30 years ago today, the Sivas massacre

ANF | 2 JULY 2023

On 2 July 1993, an angry mob torched the Madımak Hotel, killing 37 people, mostly Alevi artists and scholars who were there to attend a conference hosted by the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association (PSAKD).

In attendance was Aziz Nesin, a left-wing Turkish short story writer, hated among religious Sunnis in Turkey, who had become the target of attacks for attempting to translate Salman Rushdie's controversial novel "The Satanic Verses" into Turkish.

A group of radical Islamists, having been provoked by several local political leaders, gathered in front of the hotel following Friday prayer and accused conference participants of being infidels.

Thirty-three attendees, two hotel staff members and two protesters died in the fire. Nesin was able to escape because the attackers initially failed to recognize him.

In a controversial move, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2020 used his presidential power to pardon a man who was given an aggravated life sentence for his role in the Sivas massacre.

A number of lawyers who defended the suspects in the massacre later became politicians in Erdoğan's ruling party.

Muhlis Akarsu (45), Muhibe Akarsu (44), Gülender Akça (25), Metin Altıok (53), Mehmet Atay (25), Sehergül Ateş (29), Behçet Sefa Aysan (44), Erdal Ayrancı (35), Asım Bezirci (66), Belkıs Çakır (18), Serpil Canik (19), Muammer Çiçek (26), Nesimi Çimen (62), Carina Cuanna Thuijs (23), Serkan Doğan (19), Hasret Gültekin (22), Murat Gündüz (22), Gülsüm Karababa (22), Uğur Kaynar (37), Asaf Koçak (35), Koray Kaya (12), Menekşe Kaya (15), Handan Metin (20), Sait Metin (23), Huriye Özkan (22), Yeşim Özkan (20), Ahmet Özyurt (21), Nurcan Şahin (18), Özlem Şahin (17), Asuman Sivri (16), Yasemin Sivri (19), Edibe Sulari (40), İnci Türk (22) as well as the hotel employees Ahmet Öztürk (21) und Kenan Yılmaz (21).



## HPG announces balance sheet of war for the month of June

ANF | BEHDINAN | 2 JULY 2023

The HPG Press Center announced the war balance sheet for the month of June.

The HPG said in a statement: "The Turkish state is a nation-state based on Turkism as a race and Sunnism as a sect. The fascist Turkish nation-state system aimed to eliminate all ethnic elements other than what it considers Turkishness, all beliefs other than the Sunnis, with the methods of genocide and assimilation, and committed brutal massacres while trying to Turkify and Sunnify all communities and peoples in Turkey. On 2 July 1993, our Alevi people were brutally murdered in Sivas. On the 30th anniversary of this massacre, we respectfully commemorate the lives of the martyrs of democracy who were killed in Sivas."

### Kurdistan freedom guerrillas fighting with determination

The HPG statement stated: "One of the most important targets of the Turkish attacks carried out to destroy the Kurdish people, is the Kurdistan Freedom Guerrillas. The guerrillas are constantly the target of

the enemy attacks because of what they represent for the Kurdish people, their role in the legitimate defense of our people. They are guarantor of the cause of freedom and the leading force of our struggle. The Kurdistan Freedom Guerrillas are fighting with the Apoist self-sacrificing spirit everywhere from North Kurdistan to the Medya Defense Areas, with the awareness of their historical and current responsibility for our people's struggle for existence and freedom.”

### **Occupation attacks continued**

The statement added: “While the invading Turkish state continues its attacks in North Kurdistan and carries out extensive operations, it has continuously bombed the Medya Defense Areas from the air and from the ground. In June, North Kurdistan and Medya Defense Areas were bombed 127 times by warplanes, 40 times by combat helicopters, 2148 times by howitzers, tanks and heavy weapons. The enemy attacked our positions in the Resistance Areas 26 times with banned bombs and chemical weapons. It also tried to demolish our positions.

### **44 Turkish soldiers killed**

Our forces, which maintained their position in the face of enemy attacks, switched to active action after 13 June and dealt significant blows to the invading Turkish army. In June, our forces carried out 45 actions, and as a result of these actions, 1 contra and 44 invaders were killed. In addition, 1 Reo type military vehicle, 1 mobesse camera system and 1 radar system were destroyed.”

### **Tribute to the martyrs**

The statement paid tribute to “martyrs Xemgîn (Sami Özdemir), Bahoz (Ümit Korkmaz), Zîn (Dilan Gökalp), Mahsum (Vedat Ayhan), who were members of the provincial command in Amed. We also pay tribute to our comrades Asya (Kadriye Tetik), Azad (Thomass Johann Spiess), Koçer (Diyako Saidi), Zana, Zagros and Berxwedan who fell as martyrs in the Medya Defense Areas. The struggle for democracy and freedom, which we owe to our martyrs, will always be taken as a basis by us, our comrades, and the flag of struggle will be raised to victory.”



## **Displaced Persons Committee Serêkaniyê welcomes new UN mechanism to find missing people**

ANF | TIL TEMIR | 2 JULY 2023

Since 2011, Syria has been the scene of a global proxy war that has claimed the lives of more than 500,000 people. Another 13 million have either fled the country or been displaced within the country's borders. Over 100,000 people are also listed as missing. The unknown fate of the disappeared is one of the greatest tragedies of the Syrian war.

To deal with finding missing people, the United Nations wants to create a new institution. The formation of the “Independent Institution for Disappeared Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic” was decided on Thursday at the UN General Assembly in New York. The organization is thus complying with demands from affected families and human rights groups. After 12 years of conflict and violence, little progress has been made to alleviate the suffering of the families. These expected answers about the fate and whereabouts of the missing are stated in a corresponding resolution.

The establishment of the new UN mechanism was positively received in the autonomous region of northern and eastern Syria. The Committee of Displaced Persons from Serêkaniyê (Komîteya Koçberên Serêkaniyê) hailed the resolution as a “long overdue but welcome step” towards justice. It is extremely important that an international institution is formed that focuses on the whereabouts of the missing Syrians. At least as important is the promotion of a serious, impartial and transparent investigation so that the fate of the missing can be clarified and those responsible can be found and punished.

“At the same time, the UN General Assembly and the Security Council are calling for the fate of the people missing in Rojava to be included in the mechanism,” said the Committee of Displaced Persons from the city of Serêkaniyê, which was occupied by Turkey in October 2019. Since the war that broke out in 2011, countless people have also disappeared in the autonomous region, and this practice continues to this day. However, those responsible and perpetrators are no longer members of the regime in Damascus, but Turkey as the occupying power in parts of Rojava and its jihadist proxy troops.

The committee is demanding that the UN put pressure on Turkey and its allies and thus obtain a withdrawal of the occupying forces from Syria. This is the only way to ensure that human rights violations and war crimes in the country are ended, that the conflict is settled, that problems are solved through dialogue and that displaced persons can return to their homes. “Overcoming all these challenges is a prerequisite for peace in Syria. The UN has a responsibility to work towards this,” said the committee.

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## SOHR: Three residential complexes established in Afrin with Kuwaiti support and Turkish coordination

ANF | 2 JULY 2023

Turkey continues to build colonial settlements in occupied Afrin in northern Syria. In the course of the policy of ethnic cleansing, selected groups are settled in the newly built housing blocks by the Turkish state. Settlement construction in the Turkish occupied zone is taking place with the support of “aid organisations” from Qatar, Kuwait and Palestine.

The Turkish state occupied Afrin in spring 2018 with jihadist mercenaries and has since been pursuing a policy of demographic change. Instead of the predominantly Kurdish population, mercenaries are being settled with their families.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that Sakhaa' charity established a new residential complex with Kuwaiti support and Turkish coordination in the Afrin countryside within the "Olive Branch" area, which is controlled by Turkish forces and their proxies in north-western Aleppo.

According to SOHR, the charity brought in equipment and heavy diggers and earth-moving machinery to the area between the villages of Kafaromah and Qartqlak Sagher in Shera district in Afrin, after uprooting olive and forest trees in preparation for building three residential complexes to settle Turkish-backed militiamen's families. This coincides with the continued forced deportation of Syrian refugees from Turkey to Syrian territory.

This comes as a part of Turkey's diligent efforts to change the demography of areas which it occupied in 2018 and 2019 during "Olive Branch" and "Peace Spring" operations, seeking for narrow interests, where nearly a third of the region's indigenous inhabitants have already been displaced.

On May 6, SOHR sources reported that demographic changes operations continue in the frame of humanitarian work in Afrin by Turkish forces controlling the region.

In the same context, the local council opened "Al-Amal 2" residential village in Tarnada in the Afrin countryside, with Qatari and Palestinian support and under the supervision of a humanitarian organization.

The village holds 500 residential units with complete services, two schools for children, a football stadium, gardens, a clinic, a mosque and an institute to teach the holy Qoran.



## Surname Law, the first step towards Turkification

ANF | ISTANBUL | 2 JULY 2023

The Surname Law, one of the founding laws of the Turkish state, was passed on 21 June 1934, published in the Official Gazette on 2 July 1934 and came into force on 2 January 1935. The law stipulated that all people living within the borders established by the Turkish state were obliged to bear a surname.

When the law came into force, the newspapers said: "No one will be recognised by class differences anymore, everyone will have the surname they want." However, this was not the case. The Turkish state ended the culture of descriptive epithets attached to the first name and associated surnames with Turkishness. This was especially true for the Kurdish people.

### Almost all Kurds registered as Turks born on 1 January

Since the surname law stipulated that the surnames to be given had to be in Turkish, no Kurd could take a surname in their own language. On the contrary, they were given names fixed by the Turkish state. Moreover, while giving the Kurds surnames and registering them as Turkish, the Turkish state also fixed their birthdays and continued its attempts to erase the Kurds' past, not only with their surnames, but also with



their birthdays. After the enactment of the Surname Law, almost all Kurds were registered as born on 1 January.

The Unity and Progress Committee (İttihad ve Terakki), which gained strength during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, first began with social engineering. The most important attack of the Committee, which sought to Turkify the various peoples and religious groups existing in the Ottoman Empire, was the genocide of the Armenians in 1915. From 1915 until the establishment of the Republic, the Committee carried out numerous attacks and massacres in order to expel Armenians and Greeks and settle the people they wanted instead.

### “Social engineering evolved into ethnic engineering”

The social engineering of the committee evolved into ethnic engineering with the establishment of the republic. Dr Nazım, one of the most important İttihadists of the time, explained their aims in a meeting as follows: *“What did we make this revolution for? What was our aim? Was it to remove Sultan Hamid and his friends from their seats and chairs and replace them? I do not want to believe that this is the case. I have become your friend, comrade and brother in order to revive Turkishness. I want the Turk, and only the Turk, to live and have independent sovereignty in this community. Let us destroy elements other than the Turk. No matter what religion and sect they belong to, it is necessary to purge this country of all elements that are not Turks. Religion has no value in my eyes. My religion is Turan. Shame on us if the complete cleansing and certain extermination is not carried out! We cannot sit where we are sitting today. Tomorrow, they will grab us by the arms and throw us out. They will not only throw us out, but kill us. The revolution knows no mercy. It thinks only of the goal it wants to keep alive, and if there are obstacles and hindrances, it destroys and removes them.”*

In this process, there were attacks and massacres against other peoples, especially the Kurds. While on the one hand, there were military attacks, on the other hand, there were attempts to assimilate the peoples through laws such as the Surname Law.

### Census and Surname Law

For a long time after the introduction of the Surname Law in Turkey, the Kurds did not adopt a surname, but went on with their lives without turning to state authorities. The Turkish state deployed hundreds of officials in Kurdistan to give surnames to the Kurds and to determine their number. The aim of these officials was not to give the Kurds the surnames they wanted or to listen to their problems, but to find ways to register them and make them slaves of the Turks.

And so, it was. The officials' task was to take the first step towards erasing the Kurdish past by travelling from village to village in Kurdistan and registering people with the date of birth of 1 January. As a second step, they gave the Kurds surnames. This was to get the Kurds to fully adopt a Turkish identity. The officials did this in accordance with nationalism, one of the founding codes of the Turkish state, and the maxim of Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, then Minister of Justice: *“In Turkey, races other than Turks have only one right, which is the right to be slaves of Turks.”*

## “True Turk”, “Son of Turk” and “Mountain Turk”

Kurds were not allowed to take a surname in their own language. The ban on the Kurdish language began with the Surname Law. A Kurd could not profess his Kurdish identity even in Turkish. This was clearly stated in the name ordinance issued by the Ministry of the Interior at the time. The ordinance explicitly stated: “Surnames such as Kürtoğlu, Arnavutoğlu [Kurdish son, Albanian son], etc., which refer to one’s race, are forbidden.”

While people in Turkey adopted surnames of their own choice, in Kurdistan surnames were given according to a list available to the responsible officials. The people were not consulted in any way. The Republic, which had established a system based on the destruction of the Kurdish past, took its most important step and gave Kurds surnames that were often insulting or emphasised that they were Turkish.

Some of the surnames given specifically to Kurds were Türk (Turk), Öztürk (True Turk), Türkoğlu (Son of Turk), Kantürk (Blood Turk), Aslantürk (Lion Turk), Türkdogan (Born Turk) and Dağtürk (Mountain Turk).



## KCK: The victims of Sivas massacre live on in our struggle

ANF - 2 JULY 2023

Thirty years ago, an anti-Alevi pogrom took place in Sivas. The massacre on 2 July 1993 was directed against participants of a cultural festival that was organised in honour of the Alevi folk poet Pir Sultan Abdal in the central Anatolian city. The guests of the festival, who stayed at the Madımak Hotel, were mainly Alevi artists; poets, thinkers, singers and folklore dancers, but also critical intellectuals of different denominations.

A religiously and nationalistically incited mob used, among other things, the presence of the avowed atheist and well-known writer Aziz Nesin as a pretext to set fire to the hotel. The trapped people could not escape from the burning building because the angry mob blocked their way and cheered the fire. Although the police, military and fire brigade were alerted, they did not intervene until hours later. The events were broadcast live on state television for hours. 35 people, including two hotel employees, died in the fire at the Madımak Hotel.

The Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) released a statement remembering the victims and detailing the background of the pogrom on the occasion of the anniversary.

“The Turkish state, which was founded on monist and genocidal foundations, was hostile to all peoples, especially the Kurds and Alevis, and aimed to eliminate them through oppression, assimilation, massacres and all methods of genocide. The Sivas massacre was also committed for this purpose and is a continuation of the massacres of the Alevis in Dersim, Maraş and Çorum.

The Alevi community is a society with a faith and tradition in which there are no exploitative relations and in which communal, democratic, liberal and socialist elements prevail. Because of these characteristics, the Alevi community has been attacked and massacred by those in power throughout history. It can be said that the Alevi community is one of the communities that have suffered the most massacres and genocides in history because of its democratic, liberal and communal values. The oppression and massacres of the Alevi community have increased during the nation-state process with a monist mentality. Since the state has a monist, power-obsessed and anti-democratic mentality, it sees the Alevi community as a danger to itself and tries to eliminate the Alevi faith and culture through genocidal methods. This action of the state against the Alevi community and the Alevi faith clearly shows its genocidal face.

The monist state mentality in Turkey and Bakurê Kurdistanê [Northern Kurdistan] can only survive and secure its existence through oppression, massacres and genocide. The massacres of the Alevi community show that the colonialist state is not only hostile to the Kurdish people, but also to the Alevi community and all peoples. This hostility of the state towards all peoples and the genocidal reality make a democratic unity and a common struggle for rights necessary and compelling. We believe that this is one of the most important conclusions we should draw from the massacres. Because the massacres are mainly aimed at preventing democratisation and democratic change and ensuring the continuity of the monist, reactionary, fascist and anti-democratic system. The massacre in Sivas has made this reality even clearer. Leading intellectuals, writers and artists of the Alevi community, who have gained important democratic consciousness and maturity and who are leading society in the democratisation of Turkey, were targeted and massacred in order to prevent the development of a democratic struggle.

The Sivas pogrom, like other anti-Alevi massacres, was perpetrated by the state and state-organised forces. First, the environment was prepared by stirring up sectarian and religious sensitivities, and then the massacre was carried out by paramilitary fascist structures. The fact that the massacre was condoned by the rulers of the state and the perpetrators were not brought to justice and punished highlights this fact. That the policy of genocide against the Alevi community continues proves the state's connection with the massacres.

One of the most important features of the Sivas massacre was the aim to prevent the revolutionary democratic struggle developing in Kurdistan from meeting with the revolutionary democratic struggle in Turkey. The struggle that developed in Kurdistan under the leadership of our movement against the colonialist mentality and the fascist order of September 12 [1980 military coup] has taken great development in the 1990s and reached a popular democratic movement. The revolutionary struggle and the people's democratic movement that developed in Kurdistan started to positively influence the struggle in Turkey. The massacre in Sivas was meant to prevent the meeting of the struggle in Kurdistan with the struggle in Turkey and the formation of a strong democratic unity. Because Kurds and Alevi community are the most fundamental dynamics in the democratisation of Turkey. The continuous massacres of Kurds and Alevi community are aimed at eliminating the basic dynamics that can guarantee the democratisation of Turkey.

From the very beginning, our movement, with its struggle against the genocidal colonialist fascist mentality, has sought and strived for the democracy and freedom demands of the Kurdish people and all peoples, women and oppressed people in Turkey, especially the Alevi community. Rêber Apo [Abdullah Öcalan] has waged a very intense intellectual and practical struggle for the Kurdish Alevi people and the entire Alevi community to support their faith and identity values and to gain their freedom. He has emphasised the democratic, freedom values inherent in the Alevi faith and culture and considered it a moral, demo-

cratic and revolutionary responsibility to keep these values alive. This intensive effort of Rêber Apo has deepened the democratic character of our struggle, which advocates the coexistence of all peoples, cultures and faiths with their differences.

The fascist AKP/MHP government today stands for a massacring and genocidal mentality and policy. The unification of all reactionary, monist, fascist structures around the AKP/MHP government serves the purpose of perpetrating even greater massacres. The AKP/MHP government is already carrying out daily massacre policies against Kurds, Alevis, women, workers, labourers, intellectuals, writers and artists. The isolation and torture system in İmralı, the war against the Kurds, the oppression and attacks against Alevis, the massacres against women, the exploitation of workers and labourers, the ban on art, the imprisonment of intellectuals and journalists and the attempts to silence them should be considered as massacres. The right attitude in the face of all massacres, especially the Sivas massacre, is that those who struggle for democracy and freedom against this reactionary, monist, fascist and massacring policy of the AKP/MHP government should continue to build their democratic unity and develop the democratic struggle.

With this conviction, we would like to emphasise once again that all forces of freedom and democracy must unite even more around the principles of democratic struggle and life. This is the only way to put an end to the massacre and bring the perpetrators to justice. With this conviction, we once again reverently remember the martyrs of the Sivas massacre who were brutally and ruthlessly burnt. The memory of them will always live on in our struggle and light our way.”

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## Nine killed and injured in Israeli attack in Syria

ANF | 2 JULY 2023

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported the killing of a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and injury of four other members of non-Syrian nationality in an Israeli attack in the early hours of today.

According to the observatory, the attack targeted an ammunition warehouse in the vicinity of Al-Nejmah village on the north-eastern outskirts of Homs city. Violent explosions were heard in several areas in Homs city.

Four other members of the air defence were injured by the Israeli missiles that targeted the S-200 air defence base in Al-Qadmous area in the Tartous countryside, coinciding with the attempts of the air defence to stop the Israeli attack, which, however, failed and the Israeli missiles reached their targets.

SOHR documented 19 attacks in 2023 so far. 15 airstrikes and four rocket attacks by ground forces, during which Israel targeted several positions in Syria, destroying nearly 43 targets, including buildings, weapons and ammunition warehouses, headquarters, centres and vehicles. These strikes killed 49 combatants and injured 50 others.



## 12 killed, 173 abducted in Turkish-occupied Afrin in 6 months

ANF | 3 JULY 2023

Since the occupation in March 2018 by the Turkish state, a regime of terror has ruled the shattered canton of Afrin in northern Syria. Islamist mercenary groups and Turkish intelligence services have been deployed by Ankara to systematically restructure the population. According to various sources, the Kurdish share of the population has fallen from over ninety per cent before the occupation to between 15 and 22 per cent. The Human Rights Organisation of Afrin (Rêxistina Mafên Mirovan li Efrîn-Sûriye) is trying to document the abuses committed by the occupying forces and has today published its report for the first half of 2023.

According to the report, twelve people were killed in Afrin in the last six months by artillery fire, drone attacks or gunfire from the occupation forces. A particularly gruesome crime occurred in Jindires on 20 March, when four members of a family were killed. The victims, aged between 18 and 43, were shot by the pro-Turkey mercenary force Ahrar al-Sharqiya as they lit a fire in front of their house to celebrate the Kurdish New Year festival of Newroz.

In the same period, there were 173 kidnappings for which ransom was demanded. This inhuman practice has become a funding model for the mercenary groups in Afrin. The abductees are held in torture prisons, many of which are run by the Turkish intelligence service MIT. The latter uses all possible means to extort information from the prisoners. There are repeated reports of people dying under torture.

In addition to the human rights violations, nature and agriculture in Afrin have also been attacked. Mercenary groups and “aid organisations” with links to the Turkish state destroyed large areas of forest and agricultural land to make way for the settlement of pro-Turkish settlers. According to the report, 15,500 trees, including olive, walnut and almond trees, and numerous forest areas were cut down. In addition, more than 70 hectares of wheat and barley fields were burnt down. Various organisations from Palestine, Qatar and Turkey are involved in these settlement programmes.

### **Afrin occupied since 2018**

Afrin Canton was the westernmost canton of Rojava and North and East Syria, home to 200,000 ethnic Kurds. Though the population was overwhelmingly Kurdish, it was home to diverse religious groups including Yazidis, Alawites and Christians alongside Sunni Muslims.

On 20 January 2018, Turkey launched air strikes on 100 locations in Afrin, as the onset of an invasion they dubbed ‘Operation Olive Branch.’

The Turkish Airforce indiscriminately shelled civilians as well as YPG/YPJ positions, while a ground assault was carried out by factions and militias organised under the umbrella of the Turkish-backed National Army.

By 15 March, Turkish-backed militias had encircled Afrin city and placed it under artillery bombardment. A Turkish airstrike struck the city's only functioning hospital, killing 16 civilians.

Civilians fled and the SDF retreated, and by 18 March Turkey was in de facto occupation of Afrin. Between 400 and 500 civilians died in the invasion, overwhelmingly as a result of Turkish bombing. Other civilians were summarily executed in the field.

Prior to the Turkish invasion, Afrin had been one of the most peaceful and secure parts of Syria, virtually never seeing combat during the civil war bar occasional skirmishes between YPG/YPJ and jihadi forces on its borders. As a result, Afrin offered peaceful sanctuary to over 300,000 internally displaced people from elsewhere in Syria.

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## Military operation launched in Bitlis after a curfew in 10 settlements

ANF | BITLIS | 3 JULY 2023

A curfew was declared in 10 villages and hamlets in the Hizan district of Bitlis at 21:00 on Sunday (July 2). The curfew that will remain in force until a further notice covers the settlements of Bilgili, Akunus (Yaylacık), Govan (Sarıbal), Lanilan (Yeniçay), Xulepur (Yolbilen), Kekulan (Çalışkanlar), Sureh (Gedik), Pertavan (Akyazı), Kuran (Erencik) and Ureh (Otluk).

According to Mezopotamya agency (MA), the Turkish army has launched a large-scale operation in the areas affected by the curfew. Reports are coming through of sporadic clashes in the operation area, with the fighting reportedly intensifying in the rural areas of Xûlepûr.

Access to and from the affected settlements has been banned and houses in the village of Xûlepûr have been stormed in the early morning hours.

According to reports, three residents of the Xûlepûr village were taken into custody and are currently held at the District Gendarmerie Command.

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## Turkey extends flight ban for Sulaymaniyah

ANF | SULAYMANIYAH | 3 JULY 2023

The governor of Sulaymaniyah, Heval Ebubekir, announced on Monday that Turkey had extended the closure of its airspace to flights from Sulaymaniyah. The ban on flights from the international airport of the southern Kurdish metropolis to Turkey, which was issued by the Turkish Foreign Ministry on 3 April for an initial period of three months, has expired today. According to Ebubekir, the decision has been extended until 3 January 2024.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry had justified the flight ban in April with alleged “threats” by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and explained that the PKK’s “terrorist activities” in Sulaymaniyah had increased and that the airport had been “infiltrated”, threatening flight safety.

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## State terror against villagers amid ongoing military operation in Bitlis countryside

ANF | BITLIS | 4 JULY 2023

In the Bitlis province of northern Kurdistan, the residents of several villages are being terrorised by the Turkish army. On the grounds that PKK guerrilla fighters have been seen in the region, a curfew was imposed in ten villages in the district of Hizan on Sunday evening. The curfew was imposed by the governor’s office for an indefinite period.

In the course of a subsequently launched military operation, fighting took place and houses were stormed in the affected villages. The rural areas of the villages under curfew were shelled by the Turkish army throughout the night. Following the bombardment all night long, ground attacks were launched in the morning.

In Xûlepûr village, three people were detained and taken to the gendarmerie (military police) district headquarters. The detainees, Sakin, Muzaffer and Bedrettin Altın, were taken to Bitlis centre today and are expected to be referred to the prosecutor’s Office during the day.

According to local residents, all villages are besieged by the army. No one is allowed to leave the house. Villagers who wanted to go about their daily agricultural work were sent home by force. At night, state forces stormed into homes and asked: “Where are the terrorists?” All villagers are subjected to criminal record check. In addition to military vehicles, there are also unidentified civilian cars in the area. People in the villages say that these groups are counter-terrorist forces and compare what is happening to the 1990s, when the Turkish state pursued a scorched earth policy in Kurdistan and destroyed thousands of villages.

The villages affected by the curfew are Bilgili, Akunus (Yaylacık), Govan (Sarıbal), Lanilan (Yeniçay), Xulepur (Yolbilen), Kekulan (Çalışkanlar), Sureh (Gedik), Pertavan (Akyazı), Kuran (Erencik) and Ureh (Otluk) and the surrounding settlements.

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## HPG: Turkish army attacked guerrilla areas with tactical nuclear bomb

ANF | BEHDINAN | 4 JULY 2023

In its daily statement about the ongoing war in Kurdistan, the press centre of the People's Defence Forces (HPG) said: “The Turkish occupation army bombs the guerrilla positions and war tunnels in the Medya Defence Zones hundreds of times a day and has not achieved a single result by doing so. The guerrillas’ battle positions have also been attacked with chemical weapons and banned bombs, but their goal has not been achieved. Now, the Turkish army has committed another despicable war crime and attacked our battle position in the resistance area of Sîda in Zap with a tactical nuclear bomb, resulting in large explosions that killed our companion Şerzan Mawa. The attacks of the Turkish occupying army with tactical nuclear bombs continue.”

As the HPG had already reported, the Turkish army launched an occupation operation on 22 June in the areas of Şikefta Birîndara, Kokerê, Saca and Karker on the eastern Zap front. On 29 June, the occupation forces started a terrain fire in the resistance areas of Şikefta Birîndara and Karker and retreated to surrounding hills. The fire is still raging, and the area is being bombed by fighter jets. In Şikefta Birîndara, the army is also using explosives against positions.

Regarding recent guerrilla actions, HPG reported that guerrillas struck the Turkish positions at Girê FM in Zap with heavy weapons on 1 and 3 July.

In Xakurke, guerrillas from YJA Star (Free Women's Troops) hit a Turkish squad at Girê Şehîd Şahan with heavy weapons on 1 July.

HPG also reported 18 airstrikes by fighter jets on 1 and 2 July in the western Zap region, as well as in Gundê Bêşîlî and Gundê Yekmalê in Metîna and Xêrê and Neqeba Meyrokê in Gare. In the past three days, HPG recorded 241 attacks with howitzers, tanks and heavy weapons in the Zap, Metîna and Xakurke regions. In Sîda, Turkish troops’ attempts to demolish guerrilla positions with construction machinery continue.

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## France repatriates 10 women and 25 children from camps in North-East Syria

ANF | 4 JULY 2023

France on Tuesday repatriated 10 women and 25 children who were held in prison camps for suspected jihadists in northeast Syria, the fourth such operation in a year, the foreign ministry said.

The ministry said in a statement that the minors would be handed over to child care services while the adults would be handed over to the relevant judicial authorities.

The French women had voluntarily gone to territories across Syria and Iraq then controlled by the so-called “Islamic State” jihadists. They were captured when the jihadist group was ousted from its self-declared “caliphate” in 2019.

The return of family members of jihadist fighters who were captured or killed has been a thorny issue for European countries, particularly France, which has been targeted by jihadist attacks.

In France, any adult who went to the Iraq-Syria zone and remained there is subject to legal proceedings. A year ago, France put an end to its “case by case” approach to repatriation, which had drawn condemnation from international bodies.

Sixteen women and 35 children were brought back to France during the first repatriation operation a year ago, followed in October by the return of 15 women and 40 children.

In January, the foreign ministry announced the repatriation of 15 women and 32 children, a few days after being condemned by the UN committee against torture, which said that in refusing to repatriate women and minors in Syria, France was violating the UN convention against torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.

The foreign ministry said on Tuesday that “France thanked the local administration in north-eastern Syria for its cooperation, which made this operation possible”.

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## MSD welcomes UN initiative to find missing people in Syria

ANF | 4 JULY 2023

Since 2011, Syria has been the scene of a global proxy war that has claimed the lives of more than 500,000 people. Another 13 million have either fled the country or been displaced within the country's borders.

Over 100,000 people are also listed as missing. The unknown fate of the disappeared is one of the greatest tragedies of the Syrian war.

To deal with finding missing people, the United Nations wants to create a new institution. The formation of the “Independent Institution for Disappeared Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic” was decided on Thursday at the UN General Assembly in New York. The organization is thus complying with demands from affected families and human rights groups. After 12 years of conflict and violence, little progress has been made to alleviate the suffering of the families. These expected answers about the fate and whereabouts of the missing are stated in a corresponding resolution, which was adopted by the General Assembly by 83 votes in favor, 11 against and 62 abstentions.

The establishment of the new UN mechanism was positively received in the autonomous region of northern and eastern Syria.

The Syrian Democratic Council (MSD or SDC) released a statement welcoming the decision of the United Nations General Assembly and expressing its full readiness to provide all kinds of support for all endeavors that would end the Syrian crisis.

“We congratulate this decision, which came as a result of strenuous efforts made by human rights and humanitarian institutions that worked over the years of the Syrian crisis to reveal the fate of more than 100,000 people, according to estimates by non-governmental organizations. We hope that this decision will contribute to alleviating the suffering of the Syrians, ending their crisis,” said the MSD statement.

MSD pointed out that: “We highly appreciate that the issue of the Syrian people has become one of the priorities of the international community and the serious desire to solve it, while certain countries are still working to manage the Syrian crisis, tampering with its security and stability, inciting violence and a culture of hatred, and supporting terrorism and extremism, as happened in the recent Astana meeting.”

MSD stated that the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) had previously issued a solution initiative and a decision to prosecute ISIS members. “This trial is capable of revealing facts, including the fate of the missing,” it noted.

MSD called on the international community to take these initiatives seriously, adding; “We believe that there is no way to solve the Syrian crisis except through the participation of all Syrians without exclusion or discrimination of any party, and adherence to UN resolutions and implementing them.”

## Today marks the 32nd anniversary of the killing of HEP Diyarbakır Provincial chair Vedat Aydın

ANF | 5 JULY 2023

People's Labor Party (HEP) Diyarbakır Provincial chairperson Vedat Aydın was detained at his home by three JITEM personnel, who introduced themselves as police officers, on 5 July 1991. His body was found in Maden district of Elazığ, two days later, on 7 July.

Aydın, who had been arrested during the 12 September 1980 military coup, had spent 4 years in prison. After his release, he started working to establish the Human Rights Association (IHD) with a group of Kurdish intellectuals. Aydın, who was elected to the Board of Directors of the IHD Diyarbakır Branch in 1990, was arrested on 28 October 1990 for speaking in Kurdish at the IHD General Assembly held in Ankara.

Aydın made his defense in Kurdish at the hearing of the trial against him. He was elected to the Presidency of the IHD Diyarbakır Branch at the end of 1990, and was the provincial chair of the HEP Diyarbakır Provincial Congress in June 1991, after a 4-month detention period.

After being taken from his home on the night of 5 July 1991 by 3 JITEM personnel who introduced themselves as police, his tortured body was found under a bridge in the Maden district of Elazığ on 7 July.

At least 8 people lost their lives and dozens were injured as a result of the police attack on the march organized by hundreds of thousands of people attending the funeral in Diyarbakır on 10 July 1991, to the Mardin Kapı Cemetery.

### The Turkish campaign of the 90s

The Turkish campaign in the 90s against the Kurdish struggle for independence, was one of the most violent period in the country's recent history. And as a part of a Turkish political tradition, the Turkish state started to use its centuries-old tactics against it: mass killings and forced migration of ethnic groups.

### It all started with the murder of Vedat Aydın

Vedat Aydın was the head of the People's Labor Party (HEP) Amed (Diyarbakır) branch. He was a prominent figure and widely respected politician at that time. When he was taken into custody by the Turkish police on 5 July 1991 it wasn't big news for anybody. The Turkish state's oppression against Kurdish politicians was immense and custody or even torture was common at that time.

But things got complicated. The following day, Turkish officials denied that Vedat Aydın was in custody. There were reports of Turkish counter-guerrilla units killings in Şırnak, Cizre and Mardin but no one was thinking that a prominent figure like Vedat Aydın would be targeted.

On 7 July, an unidentified body was found under a bridge in Maden, a district of Elazığ province about 50 kilometres north of Amed. There were signs of extreme torture and multiple gunshot wounds on the body. Aydın's family rushed to the morgue in Maden and identified the body.

### **Turkish police ready to kill**

This murder sent shockwaves through the Kurdish community, especially Amed, Vedat Aydın's hometown. Turkish authorities handed Aydın's body to his family three days later. They were told that it was because of juridical processes. But it was something else. The Turkish state had its own preparations for the funeral. And when everything was set, they paved the way for the funeral.

More than a hundred thousand people attended the funeral. The ceremony was led by prominent figures of Kurdish politicians as well as human rights defenders and intellectuals. Aydın's coffin was brought to Sümer Mosque in central Amed. After prayers, the crowd walked to Mardinkapi Cemetery for the burial.

The crowd was stopped before the cemetery's entrance by the Turkish police. The police were saying that they wouldn't let such a large crowd enter the cemetery. As there were talks to remove the police barrier, shots were heard.

The masked so-called special forces opened fire against the crowd. There was immense panic. Gunshots continued for 3-4 minutes. Four people were killed on the spot. Several were wounded and taken to the hospital.

After the first attack, the police removed the barrier and let the crowd move to the cemetery. The crowd gathered back again. Aydın was buried after a short speech by his brother Deniz Aydın.

### **People deliberately targeted**

Everybody thought that it was over and the crowd dispersed and most people started walking to the city center. But the road was blocked by Turkish police again. This time, there were more policemen, more special forces and armoured vehicles. The police let the crowd walk into the city in small groups. After most people passed the police barrier, only a few thousand people were waiting for the police's permission to walk to the city center.

First there were three shots. Then hundreds of armed policemen started to open fire on the remaining people. A helicopter and an armoured vehicle were escorting the attack. People who were trying to flee the area were captured and beaten by Turkish police.

MPs Ahmet Türk, Orhan Doğan, Hatip Dicle and other Kurdish politicians were tortured along with journalists and human rights defenders.

The attack lasted around 20 minutes. It left 23 people dead and more than two thousand wounded. 19 were buried at night. Only 4 families were granted permission for a proper funeral.

## 23 people killed but no one appeared before court

No Turkish officials or policemen appeared before the court for the killing of innocent civilians. The murderers of Vedat Aydın were never found.

The murder of Vedat Aydın was the beginning of an era. An era of political murders and extrajudicial killings. Between 1991-99, several thousand Kurds were killed, including MP Mehmet Sincar. About two million Kurds were forced to migrate, about 17 thousand villages were burned to the ground.

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## Call for international action for Heseke Canton left without water and declared a disaster zone

ANF | HESEKE | 5 JULY 2023

The invading Turkish state continues to use water as a tool of war against the people of North-East Syria after its invasion plans against the region were foiled. The invaders, who use water to put economic pressure on the Autonomous Administration, mostly target the Alouk Water Station and the Euphrates River.

The Turkish state and its mercenaries have been cutting off the water reaching Heseke Canton from Alouk (Elok) Station for more than two years. Although agreements have been made for the delivery of water to Heseke, the Turkish state and its mercenaries constantly violate them.

Millions of people in the Heseke Canton have been suffering from lack of water after the occupation forces cut off water supply from the Alouk Station, which used to be the main drinking water source of the Heseke region before the invasion in October 2019 and has been under the control of the occupation forces since. The Turkish state cut off the water more than 30 times as a means of special warfare.

On July 3, the Water Directorate in Heseke Canton declared all the cities, districts, villages and towns in the canton a disaster area due to the ongoing water cuts. The villages of Til Temir as well as the Washokani and Serekaniye camps are also included in the disaster area. The Water Directorate pointed out that the continuation of the disaster is the result of the agreement of Russia, Turkey, and the Syrian regime to stifle the people in North-East Syria and annihilate their democratic experience.

Speaking to ANHA, Isa Yunis, co-chair of the Water Directorate in Heseke, said: “We are trying to have the voice of Heseke people heard by the international community, concerned parties and the active forces in North-East Syria.”

Yunis warned that the Turkish state cutting off water to Alouk Station could lead to a major humanitarian disaster in the near future.

Speaking about their precautions, Yunis stated: “We have water tanks. In order to overcome this disaster, we will provide service to the residents and distribute water through municipalities and communes.”

Yunis noted that the Water Directorate in Heseke possesses 60 water tanks, which, however, are not sufficient to meet the needs of the residents.

Yunis said they hoped to come up with a solution through a project to draw water from the district of Amude. He called on all humanitarian relief agencies.

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## Turkish bombardment injures two civilians in Kobanê

ANF | KOBANE | 5 JULY 2023

In the northern Syrian city of Kobanê, two people were injured in an attack by the Turkish army on Friday. According to the Kobanê clinic, two male health workers aged 25 and 30 were driving to a rescue mission near Newroz Square in the south-east of the city when their ambulance was targeted.

The vehicle was apparently only narrowly missed, but the two men were hit by shrapnel and taken to hospital. According to the hospital, the injuries were not life-threatening, but treatment in one case could be protracted.

In a Twitter post on Wednesday, the press spokesperson of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Ferhad Şamî, said: “This afternoon, a new Turkish aggression targeted the vicinity of Kobane city, using artillery and UAV shellings. On these days eight years ago, Kobane was the spearhead in the final defeat of ISIS, starting from Tal Abyad to Raqqa.”

Turkey has been attacking North-East Syria for years, enjoying international silence. The attacks are targeted specifically against representatives of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) structures, members of combat units as well as the civilian population. After the parliamentary and presidential elections last May, these attacks were intensified. Since 7 June, at least 21 people have been murdered by the Turkish army in northern and eastern Syria, most recently the co-chair of the Qamishlo Canton Council, her deputy and her driver, who was also a member of AANES.

### **Kobane, liberated after 134 days of relentless resistance**

The strategic battle of Kobanê took place between 15 September 2014 and 26-27 January 2015, when it was liberated.

ISIS mercenaries launched the first attack on the city of Kobanê on the night between 14 and 15 September, 2014. The siege would last till 26-27 January 2015. Those months of battle would witness a defense of the values of humanity with an epic spirit of self-sacrifice which has gone down in history.

On 15 September morning, ISIS launched an attack on the southern front. Differently from the previous simultaneous attacks from all three fronts, ISIS gangs now deployed arms and militants in the southeastern and southwestern parts too, and started an offensive from five fronts.

As ISIS gangs launched this offensive with all their forces and weapons in Syria, it became clear that their aim was to ensure an entire occupation of Kobanê in a short time.

Mishtenur Hill was hit by heavy weapons and tanks, and clashes broke out between the gang groups that infiltrated the hill and the YPG/YPJ fighters. The Mishtenur Hill is sacred ground for the people of Kobanê, and it witnessed the sacred resistance of the YPG and YPJ fighters. The hill fell under ISIS control on October 5, after days of heroic resistance against heavy attacks on the hill.

After Miştenur, the gangs started to enter the Kaniya Kurda neighborhood from the east. To the west, the Izae Hill had fallen under gang control and the YPG/YPJ fighters had taken positions in the trenches dug by Til Sheir Hill and further. To the south, the gangs had reached the Martyr Dicle Cemetery, close to the city entrance.

In the first three months of the resistance, the YPG and YPJ fighters put up resistance, and it was time for the YPG/YPJ commanders and fighters to launch the process in Kaniya Kurda that would lead to declaring Kobanê the hell of ISIS. The launch happened in early December, in the form of the Kobanê Emancipation Operation.

The operation process had begun in Kobanê, the YPG and YPJ fighters had abandoned the defensive position after a long time and were gearing up for operation mode. The YPG/YPJ fighters cleared most of the city of gangs in a short time with this morale and enthusiasm, and in the end reached the Miştenur Hill. After Miştenur, the second large scale maneuver was the southern front operation. This operation cleared the gangs completely from this front.

On the third day of the operation, preparations were completed to deliver the final, fatal blow to ISIS gangs. The declaration of the city's freedom would be in time for the anniversary of the canton declaration, January 27.

The Kaniya Kurda operation then started. Kobanê was to be declared free after Kaniya Kurda was taken. For more than four months, the fighters fought tooth and nail, finger on trigger at all times, through the cold, with no sleep, little food, insufficient ammunition. Marching towards death in a resistance almost defying the laws of nature, they fought against better weapons, better logistics, better numbers and inhumane methods.

The YPG and YPJ fighters rushed to the Kaniya Kurda Hill to put up a giant YPG flag. After YPJ Commander Meryem Kobanê said "We will declare to the whole world on the Kaniya Kurda hill they entered the city from that Kobanê is hell for ISIS," her words were made into reality on the 134th day of the relentless resistance. The Kobanê resistance created a divide into "Before Kobanê" and "After Kobanê". History was interrupted in Kobanê, and was rewritten.

## Mazlum Abdi appeals to Kurdish political and military forces

ANF | HESEKE | 6 JULY 2023

An international workshop kicked off today in the northern Syrian city of Heseke about the Treaty of Lausanne, under the title “Lausanne: Course Correction, Stability and Regional Security”.

The two-day workshop organized by the Rojava Centre for Strategic Studies (NRLS) is attended by over 150 lawyers, politicians and researchers from Europe and the Middle East, as well as Berivan Xalid, Co-Chair of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) Executive Council, and representatives of political parties, civil society organizations and research centers.

Three sessions will be held on the first day of the workshop, which will also host a speech in the name of the Asrın Law Office that represents Kurdish people’s leader Abdullah Öcalan and his fellow prisoners on the prison island of Imrali in Turkey.

On its second day, the workshop will discuss “the current situation of the Kurds and the challenges they face; ways to confront the war of extermination targeting the Kurdish people; how to overcome Lausanne and the optimal solution to the Kurdish question and the region”.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Mazlum Abdi, sent a video message to the international forum and spoke about the policy of division and denial that the Treaty of Lausanne has given rise to.

“The policy of denial that began with the Treaty of Lausanne did not achieve its goals, and failed. Today, the Kurds have the opportunity to assert their cause and their presence on the map of the Middle East, in light of the political and military changes in the Middle East and the world,” he said.

Abdi stated, “There are great gains for the Kurds, which have been achieved through great sacrifices. Today, the Kurds are striving to guarantee their rights in Bashur, Rojhilat, Bakur and Rojava Kurdistan”.

Calling for the preservation of the gains, Abdi appealed to the political and military forces in Kurdistan, saying: “We must develop ways to preserve these gains. In Bashur (South Kurdistan) there are gains that must be preserved and supported. In Bakur (North Kurdistan) there are great efforts and resistance shown in the face of denial attempts, so our people there must be supported. And the revolution in Rojhilat (East Kurdistan) needs to be embraced to make it reach its goals, as well as in Rojava.”

Abdi called on the Kurdish people and the political and military forces in the first place to continue the struggle and resistance, to unify their forces, to move urgently without any conditions, and to assess the stage accurately in order to avoid wasting the available opportunity for the Kurds today.

Mazlum Abdi stressed that the Syrian Democratic Forces are ready for any kind of dialogue and unification of forces for the Kurdish cause without any conditions, referring to its previous attempts to unify efforts at the level of the political powers in Rojava through the initiative of the SDF.



“Through our initiative, we tried to unify the ranks of the political powers and parties in the region, and we were able to reach a political path, but it did not continue. We are ready to resume those talks between all the Kurdish political parties, and we hope that the Kurdish parties will return to the dialogue table”.

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## Footage of Turkish attack on ambulance in Kobanê

ANF | KOBANE | 6 JULY 2023

The Hawarnews news agency (ANHA) published footage of an attack by the Turkish army in the autonomous region of northern and eastern Syria. The attack in the south-east of Kobanê had taken place on Wednesday, narrowly missing an ambulance. The ambulance of the “Kobanê Clinic” had been dispatched due to a previous attack that targeted a paint factory near Newroz Square on Miştenûr Hill. When the vehicle parked in front of the factory, the place was bombed again. Two paramedics barely survived the attack and escaped with minor injuries.

The footage released by ANHA shows that the bombing blew a large hole in a wall of the paint factory that was attacked. Security forces believe that the attack took the form of a drone strike. According to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), other areas in the greater Kobanê area were also targeted by the Turkish army the day before, not only by drones, but also by Turkish border troops. Kobanê is located on the Syrian-Turkish border opposite Suruç district of Urfa. The two towns are only a few kilometres apart.

Apparently, no one was injured in the paint factory itself. However, massive property damage was caused, also as a result of a large fire triggered by the bombardment. The fire brigade was in action for several hours to fight the flames.

You can watch the footage here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLWA5gIMT7A>

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## Guerrillas destroy Turkish military radar system in Zap

ANF | BEHDINAN | 7 JULY 2023

The Kurdish guerrillas have destroyed a military radar system belonging to the Turkish army. The artillery reconnaissance radar was set up at Girê FM in the western area of the Zap front, the press office of the People’s Defense Forces (HPG) said in a summary of the war in the Medya Defense Areas.

The report referred to Tuesday and Wednesday and contained information on three other actions by the HPG and the women's guerrilla YJA Star against Turkish forces in the area around FM Hill. Medium and

heavy weapons were used in all attacks. An advance attempt by the Turkish military was stopped by guerrilla artillery on the evening of 4 July.

The guerrillas were also active in Xakurke. There, army units came under fire on Girê Şehîd Şahan. The balance sheet does not show whether soldiers were killed or injured in the actions. The HPG said that heavy air and ground attacks on guerrilla areas were carried out. The Sîda area in Zap was attacked twice with unconventional bombs. In addition, the western front of the region saw heavy reconnaissance and combat drone activity.

Various areas in Zap, Metîna, Gare and Xakurke have also been bombed by Turkish warplanes at least 18 times in the same two days. Most of the 8 airstrikes targeted the western area of the Zap Front, while there were six more airstrikes in Metîna. In the same period, artillery and tank shells hit these regions at least 218 times. In Sîda, the Turkish army has repeatedly tried to neutralize the local defense positions and war tunnels with construction machines.



## Talabani appeals to Kurds to pursue national unity

ANF | HESEKE | 7 JULY 2023

The president of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Bafil Talabani, sent a message to the Lausanne Agreement International Working Group organized by the Rojava Center for Strategic Studies (NRLS) in Heseke.

Bafil Talabani's message was read by NRLS member Beritan Mistefa. Talabani expressed his happiness and pride at the workshop and added: "We congratulate the efforts to draw attention to the Treaty of Lausanne signed against the Kurds a century ago and the efforts of the officials and participants of the working group. About 100 years ago, the Kurds faced genocide from all sides. These agreements were signed at the expense of the Kurdish people, Kurdish territory and culture. Kurds have always struggled to protect their rights. But unfortunately, they have become victims of global interests. However, our people survived despite the division and preserved their geography with their resistance."

Talabani continued: "The enemy is constantly trying to invade Kurdistan and destroy the history of its people. But let this enemy know that the Kurdish people will stand still and firm like the mountains of Kurdistan and will not surrender. All world powers should know that war is not our desire and we are against war.

Our goal is always to live freely and honorably in our territory. For this reason, as the PUK, we continue our efforts to achieve national unity, as desired by Mam Jalal Talabani. We tell the Kurdish people that this is the process of uniting our ranks."

Talabani urged everyone to pursue national unity in the interest of the Kurdish cause.



## HPG: Two injured guerrilla fighters were taken prisoner in Şırnak

ANF | BEHDINAN | 7 JULY 2023

The Press Centre of the People's Defence Forces (HPG) reported that two guerrilla fighters were injured and taken prisoner by the Turkish army in the Şırnak province of northern Kurdistan.

According to the statement, the Turkish army carried out a massive bombardment on 21 June in the area around the village of Sîxurpaşa in the district of Beytüşşebap where the two guerrillas, Murat Yalçın (Al-işer) and Bişar Bahadır (Maaz), were stationed. The area was bombed by attack helicopters till 09:30 in the morning on 22 June. In the course of the heavy shelling, the two guerrillas sustained serious injuries and were taken prisoner by the Turkish forces.

On the other hand, HPG reported continued attacks by the Turkish army in the guerrilla-held Medya Defense Zones in southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq). Accordingly, the western front of Şehîd Delîl in the Zap region was bombed six times by fighter jets on 5 and 6 July. Three more airstrikes targeted the Golka and Girê Hekarî areas in Metîna.

The resistance areas of Girê Bahar, Girê Cûdî, Girê Amêdî and Sîda, which are also located in Zap, were bombed a total of 66 times with howitzers, tanks and heavy weapons on 6 July. Drone activity was recorded over Şehîd Delîl, where, in addition to in Sîda and Girê FM, Turkish troops made attempts to demolish the guerrillas' tunnel facilities with construction machinery, accompanied by attacks on their positions.

In the meantime, guerrillas from a mobile unit of the Free Women's Troops (YJA Star) carried out an action on the western front of the Zap on 6 July. The action was directed against a military radar system of the Turkish army on Girê FM hill. The device was targeted with heavy weapons and destroyed, HPG stated.



## Turkish army dispatches troops to South Kurdistan border

ANF | HAKKARI | 7 JULY 2023

The invading Turkish state, which has been carrying out attacks against the Avashin, Zap and Metina regions of the guerrilla-held Medya Defense Zones in South Kurdistan since 17 April 2022, has also intensified its military activity in the border region.

Reports are coming through of intensified military activity in the province of Hakkari in recent days.

Local sources report daily military deployment to the border area from the districts of Yüksekova, Şemdinli and Derecik.

According to reports, a large number of troops are being transported to the border of Çukurca from the military posts in the Van province. These soldiers are stationed in the military bases built in the border villages of Serê Sevê, Ertuş and Bilêcan.

On the other hand, reports are coming through of military equipment transport by trucks to the border region.

The so-called village guards in the region were reportedly sent an instruction for a military operation as part of preparations for an imminent occupation attack by the Turkish army.

Village guards are paramilitary units used in Kurdistan against guerrillas and unwelcome opposition members. They consist to a considerable extent of tribal leaders, large landowners, families, and individuals who have often worked with the state for decades in an attempt to advocate for the state's interests in Kurdistan. Some of the village guards join this system voluntarily, while others are threatened with murder, arrest, and expulsion and become village guards under pressure. The Hamidiye regiments in the Ottoman Empire are considered the historical model of the Village Guards. Today's village guard system emerged in 1985, a year after the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) launched its armed struggle. At that time, the Turkish government under Turgut Özal began recruiting and arming Kurdish tribes and clans in the war against the PKK. Thousands of Kurdish villages that rejected the village guard system were burned and razed to the ground by the state in the 1990s.



## Femicide

### Yazidi woman wants to take part in ISIS trials as a witness

ANF | 1 JULY 2023

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) announced on 10 June that it would try foreign ISIS members in its own people's courts. This follows years of unsuccessful appeals to the states of origin to set up an international court to punish the crimes committed by ISIS. More than ten thousand ISIS members from over sixty countries are held in AANES prisons, and some 60,000 ISIS family members are in camps such as al-Hol Camp.

“In its decision to judge crimes on its own soil, an essential factor for the AANES was the availability of reliable evidence and, above all, witnesses, such as survivors of ISIS crimes,” writes Ibrahim Murad in a guest [commentary](#) for Taz. And indeed, more and more people are coming forward to testify at the trials. One of them is Sûrî Xelef, who lost two sons in the ISIS attack on 3 August 2014 in Shengal (Sinjar) in northern Iraq. She says that the brutality she experienced haunts her and that it is difficult to describe the pain of losing her two children.

The ISIS massacre in Shengal, which was recognised as genocide against the Yazidi community by the German Parliament (Bundestag) in January, is described by the Yazidis as the 73rd genocide (or ferman as Yazidis call it) in their history of persecution. It is estimated that about 10,000 people fell victim to the genocide. Over 7,000 women and children were abducted by ISIS, more than 400,000 people were driven from their homes and thousands more are still missing.

Sûrî Xelef experienced the massacre in the village of Siba Şêx Xidir. She tells how the Islamists invaded the village with black flags and swords in their hands. The people fled and her family decided to split up and take three different routes to the mountains of Shengal to meet there. She never saw her sons again. “I don’t know if my two sons were killed or kidnapped. Maybe they died of thirst in the desert.”

The families of the victims are ready to attend any court to demand the rights of their children, says Sûrî Xelef. To this day, the fate of thousands of missing persons remains unresolved, and ISIS continues to pose a great danger: “I will go to court as a victim and tell them what happened to me. I will tell them the number of victims and the number of injured. The fate of our women and children is still unclear. The night the ISIS kidnapped the women, they gave them the flesh of the children to eat. What religion allows this? All religions condemn this cruel act.”

However, the processes will require large financial, logistical and legal resources. According to Murad Ibrahim, AANES currently lacks the capacity to manage these processes without international support. He calls for EU member states to provide AANES with the necessary support and to cooperate with it in accordance with applicable international law. “It seems that there is a lack of awareness of the danger posed by the camps and prisons in northern and eastern Syria. If the international community continues to ignore the problem, there is a threat of more terrorist attacks, especially in Europe,” said Ibrahim Murad.



## Saturday Mothers attacked and detained again in the 953rd week of action

ANF | ISTANBUL | 1 JULY 2023

Police in Istanbul have arrested more than a dozen members and supporters of the Saturday Mothers on the grounds of a violation of an official ban on assemblies at Galatasaray Square. Among those taken into custody are relatives of the “disappeared” and several human rights activists, including Human Rights Association (IHD) Co-Chair lawyer Eren Keskin.

For their 953rd weekly action, the Saturday Mothers initiative came together in Istanbul today to express their decades-old demand for information about the whereabouts of people who have disappeared in state custody and the punishment of murders by unknown perpetrators. From different starting points in the central district of Beyoğlu, the participants managed to move via the shopping streets Istiklal and Meşrutiyet in front of the Galatasaray High School although the police had partially cordoned off the city centre and so-called anti-riot squads were patrolling side streets. At their destination, the group, accompanied by the Green Left Party parliamentarians Ceylan Akça and Kezban Konukçu, was surrounded.

“We are here today to make a peaceful statement according to our constitutional right,” said Keskin, and criticised the “illegitimate” ban on assemblies against the Saturday Mothers’ vigil and accused the police of flouting a ruling by the Constitutional Court. Turkey’s highest court had ruled in February that the bans on demonstrations against the initiative ordered since 2018 were illegal and rejected objections by the Interior Ministry, which justified the restrictions on the freedom of assembly and demonstration with an alleged threat to public order posed by the Saturday Mothers.

For thirteen weeks, the group’s vigils have therefore again taken place on Istiklal Avenue, in a small side street in front of the Istanbul IHD office. The police ignore the ruling of the Constitutional Court and break up the protest week after week by using violence and arrests. With their hands partly tied behind their backs, at least fifteen members of the Saturday Mothers were taken away by the police today. In addition to Eren Keskin, IHD Istanbul chairperson Gülseren Yoleri and IHD board member Leman Yurtsever, those detained include Hanife Yıldız, Mikail Kırbayır, Ali Ocak, Besna Tosun, Sebla Arcan, Hatice Korkmaz, İsmail Yücel, Gülendam Özdemir, Ömer Kavran and Deniz Aytaç, former HDP MP Oya Ersoy and Armenian journalist Arat Dink.



## Movie “Tearing Walls Down” screens in Europe

ANF | 3 JULY 2023

The movie “Tearing Walls Down”, directed by Hebung Polat and Şerif Çiçek and produced by Adil Demirci, Onur Güler and Yeşim Coşkun, talks about four female politicians, Figen Yüksekdağ, Gülten Kışanak, Aysel Tuğluk and Sibel Yiğitalp. The film is currently screening in different European cities.

This is an interview with director Hebung Polat and producer Onur Güler.

*When we look at the title of the movie, Figen Yüksekdağ’s book ‘Tearing Walls Down’ comes to mind. What is the relationship between the book and the movie?*

When we started shooting the documentary, we didn’t have a title in mind. However, in the following period, the books of both Figen Yüksekdağ and Gülten Kışanak were published. We read both books in detail and got the information needed for the documentary. Then, while we were discussing the title with our team, the name of Figen Yüksekdağ’s book had an aspect that corresponded to the political process and also had a symbolic meaning. Figen Yüksekdağ also came from a relatively conservative family of

Turkish origin, but as a revolutionary socialist woman, her struggle with the Kurdish people side by side and her election as the mayor of the city where Gültan Kışanak was tortured 40 years ago, pointed to the walls that are being demolished today. As a result, we can say that the title of the book and the story found each other.

*In your previous movie, "Exile or Prison", we have seen politicians who had to go into exile. In this film, we see female politicians. Politicians in exile and in prison.*

There has always been a price to pay for doing politics in favor of the oppressed in Turkey and Kurdistan. When it comes to the demands of the workers, the laborers, the marginalized and the Kurdish people, this mechanism of oppression doubles. Dozens of parties created by the Kurdish people were shut down, thousands of politicians were arrested, people faced massacres. Of course, this oppression and bullying did not start with Figen Yüksekdağ. But in the last 7 years, it has gained a new political dimension with the attacks against the HDP, especially on 4 November 2016. As a result, hundreds of politicians were sent to prisons or forced into exile in an attempt to silence them.

People reacted to these policies by using all their democratic rights. They took to the streets. We wanted to contribute to this struggle from the field of art and convey these conditions of prison and exile to the audience. We wanted to add a new breath to the struggle, to reach the segments that we could not reach before.

In addition, Kurdish cinema, which has further established itself as a solid reality in recent years with films such as Ji bo Azadiye, Blackberry Time or Kobane, has become a way to tell different stories and reach different audiences.

*Gültan Kışanak, Figen Yüksekdağ, Aysel Tuğluk and Sibel Yiğitalp are Kurdish women politicians in Turkey. They are imprisoned or in exile. Four stories that show the reality of making policy in Turkey.*

One of the most fundamental problems of the current Turkish system is that the Kurdish people want their collective rights. And this is a problem for the establishment. The problem of democracy in Turkey has been seriously violated. It is very difficult to do politics in Turkey, especially if you are Kurd and you engage in a democracy struggle. Thousands of people are kept in isolation in prison because of their ideas. In such a situation, we can say that doing politics and doing it with your female identity poses a threat to the Turkish state. We know that all sections of the struggle for democracy are fighting oppression, censorship and many problems in Turkey. This applies to every sector. Recently, artists, journalists, theatre actors and filmmakers have been arrested. There is an attempt to reset the social memory of a people and society. In other words, we can say that the regime wants to intimidate with fascist methods in all areas of society.

*Can we get information about the film production? (Where was it filmed, how was it filmed, etc.)*

Our film was produced in 10 months and shooting lasted 5 months. A team directed by Şerif Çiçek shot the filming in Europe. One of our teams shot in Turkey and North Kurdistan under the direction of Hebung Polat. We filmed Sibel Yiğitalp in Germany. We witnessed Sibel's daily life and political activities in exile. We shot Aysel Tuğluk and Sedat Şenoğlu in Istanbul. We shot the house of Kışanak in Amed. We also went to Kandıra prison a few times and managed to do some shooting there. We also filmed something in Dersim.

*Did you have any difficulties during the shooting of the movie?*

Of course, we had some problems. We can say that we had serious difficulties, especially on our way to Kandira prison. We had to shoot in secret there. Because if they knew we were filming, they could have directly confiscated our technical equipment. In the end, we managed to do some filming. Apart from that, the 6 February earthquake occurred as we were filming, so we, of course, rescheduled things. After the earthquake, we regrouped the crew and completed the filming.

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## KCDP says 22 women were killed in June

ANF | 4 JULY 2023

The We Will Stop Femicide Platform (KCDP) published the figures related to male violence for the month of June. According to the report, men killed 22 women, while 27 died under suspicious circumstances.

According to the report, most of the women were killed because they wanted a divorce, refused to reconcile, refused to marry or have a relationship, wanted to make a decision about their own life. The reason why 13 women were murdered could not be established.

The report said that “the inability to determine the reason for the killing of 13 women is a result of the attempt to hide the violence against women and femicides. Unless it is determined by whom and why women were killed, a fair trial will not be carried out, suspects and murderers are not given deterrent punishments, and preventive measures are not implemented, the violence will continue to increase.”

### ‘Deaths under suspicious circumstances must be clarified’

The KCDP noted that there has been a very serious increase in the number of women who died under suspicious circumstances. These deaths were presented as suicides or natural deaths. In June, 27 women died under suspicious circumstances.

The statement said: “Women’s deaths in suspicious circumstances, unfortunately, can be even more challenging than femicides. It is necessary to expose whether women were killed, or really died by accident, or whether their death was gender-based or if they committed suicide or were driven to suicide.”

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## 12-year-old girl shot by police in Iran succumbs to her wounds

ANF | TEHRAN | 6 JULY 2023

After the murder of a young Kurdish woman, Jina Amini, in Tehran in September 2022, state violence to suppress the unprecedented popular uprising is escalating.

A 12-year-old girl, Melika Borji, succumbed to her wounds less than four months after being shot twice by Iranian police forces in the city of Karaj on 16 March.

The girl was shot in the head with a firearm in Keraj, in the province of Elborz. According to reports from Iran, she died in hospital.

Hundreds of people have been killed by Iranian state forces since September.



## CFWIJ: Kurdish women journalists are targeted most by the Turkish government

ANF | 6 JULY 2023

The Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ) released its [2023 First Quarterly Report](#), according to which at least 100 women journalists spent the first quarter of the year behind bars, 4 less than in the first quarter of the previous year.

“Although there is a small decline in imprisoned women journalists, the number should be zero. Additionally, we are worried with the increase of physical and legal harassment against women journalists compared to the first quarter of 2022. More needs to be done to ensure that women and LGBTQI journalists can work in a safe and supportive environment that enables them to carry out their duties without fear of violence or intimidation,” said the CFWIJ.

According to the report, 100 women journalists spent the first quarter of 2023 behind bars, 24 women journalists physically attacked and 23 women journalists legally harassed.

The women journalists behind bars include 28 in Iran, 19 in Turkey, 15 in China, 9 in Belarus, 8 in Myanmar, 4 in Egypt, 3 in Russia, 3 in Vietnam, 2 in Ethiopia, 2 in Somalia, 1 in Laos, 1 in Syria, 1 in Hong Kong, 1 in the Philippines, 1 in Burundi, 1 in Palestine and 1 in Saudi Arabia.

“The overall intimidation of the press in some of the most censored countries has led to selfcensorship, resulting in fewer journalists taking risks and more cautious reporting under censorship. This creates a situa-

tion where journalists are unable to report freely and without fear of retaliation, which ultimately affects the quality of the information that is disseminated to the public,” the report said.

## 6 Turkish journalists assaulted while reporting on the aftermath of earthquakes

Journalists covering the devastating impact of the February earthquakes in Turkey not only faced practical challenges trying to access victims on the ground but were also frequently harassed and assaulted by citizens. CFWIJ recorded 6 incidents where women journalists were prevented from filming at disaster sites, threatened, or assaulted by locals.

### Turkey’s legal harassment of critical journalists

CFWIJ reported that the Turkish government leads the list of countries weaponizing the law to silence women journalists. “Similar to the first quarter of 2022, Turkey has the highest number of legal harassment cases. Authorities have consistently resorted to travel bans, and bogus legal charges, including “insulting of public officials.”

The report pointed out that Kurdish women journalists are targeted most by the government, cynically using terrorism charges to censor and persecute them.

On the other hand, 8 journalists were targeted with legal proceedings in January and February 2023.

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# Ecocide

## Old Van City is being destroyed

ANF | VAN | 1 JULY 2023

The historical ruins known as the “Old Van City” on the outskirts of Van Castle are being destroyed. Treasure hunters have long been damaging the ruins which were founded in the Urartian period. Apart from treasure hunters, many areas with historical ruins are used as barns. Historian Hasan Umar emphasized that the old city should be taken under immediate protection.

### Historical heritage is not protected

Speaking to MA, Umar noted that the history of the old city dates to 800 BC, defining the ruins that have survived as great historical heritage. Remarking that the artefacts left by the Urartians are not preserved, he said: “Cultural heritage also means a basin for humanity. Humanity embraces its own historical values, culture and values. The Old Van City should also be embraced.”

## Destruction of cultural heritage

Umar pointed out that all the artifacts and old cities in the western provinces of Turkey were taken under protection and restored. He continued: “The indifference to Van city raises a question mark. Ancient inscriptions, languages, artefacts and knowledge are all here. In short, if this city is taken care of, tourism can prosper. The old city, which has been declared as an archaeological site, needs to be protected. If you declare a place a protected area, you should protect it. If you don't, it means that you do not see this history as your own. You simply say that 'I came from a foreign region, I occupied these lands, I need to destroy the existing civilization and I need to prove that these lands belong to me'. Sovereign powers want to destroy the regions and cultures they have colonized. If treasure hunters are not prevented, then the aim is to destroy that culture.”

Umar concluded: “Such a historical site must be embraced. Cultures are the common heritage of humanity. Therefore, this approach must be abandoned, and the Van Castle and the structures in its surroundings must be preserved.”



# Human Rights Violations

## Turkey among ten worst countries for workers' rights, says ITUC

ANF | 1 JULY 2023

The Global Rights Index published by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), confirmed that Turkey is among the ten worst countries in the world in terms of workers' rights.

The section dedicated to [Turkey](#) highlighted the repression of strikes, the arbitrary arrests of trade unionists, and the systematic union busting employed by employers.

The report said: “Throughout 2023, workers' freedoms and rights were relentlessly attacked, with law enforcement cracking down on protests and trade union leaders facing unjust arrests.”

The report added: “Moreover, employers continued their systematic efforts to undermine unions by systematically terminating workers who attempted to organize.”

In the list of 148 countries, the ten worst countries for workers' rights include Bangladesh, Belarus, Ecuador, Egypt, Eswatini, Guatemala, Myanmar, Tunisia, the Philippines, and Turkey.

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## At least 354 people executed in Iran in six months

ANF | 3 JULY 2023

Iran Human Rights (IHR) reported that at least 354 people, including six women, were executed in the first six months of 2023. Accordingly, 20% of all executions were Baluch minorities.

206 people were executed for drug-related charges, a 126% rise compared to the same period last year.

Of the 354 recorded executions in 2023, only 43 (12%) were reported by official media, the remainder were verified by Iran Human Rights sources through at least two independent sources.

Underlining the accelerated speed of the Islamic Republic of Iran's execution machine, Iran Human Rights once again calls on the international community to break their silence and make every effort to save the lives of death row prisoners in Iran by taking a stance on the state killings.

Director, Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam said: "The death penalty is used to create societal fear and prevent more protests. The majority of those killed are low-cost victims of the killing machine, drug defendants who are from the most marginalised communities. We especially call on the UNODC and Member States funding joint projects with Iran, to break their meaningful silence on the execution of more than 206 people for drug offences, and to make all collaborations contingent on halting drug executions."

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## Aygül: Journalists in Turkey and Kurdistan risk their lives

ANF | VAN | 4 JULY 2023

Sinan Aygül, an investigative journalist who specializes in exposing corruption in the AKP municipality of Tatvan in the province of Bitlis, was the victim of a violent attack after his feature was published.

Thanks to clear surveillance camera footage and massive public pressure, the attackers, Yücel Baysal, Tatvan mayor's bodyguard, and police officer Engin Kaplan were arrested. They are accused of intentional bodily harm using a weapon.

### **“We will not be silent”**

Sinan Aygül, who has long reported corruption, irregularities and dirty affairs in Tatvan, exposed further irregularities related to the city government’s real estate tenders. “The exposure of this corruption was the last straw. As a journalist, I’ve faced threats before. But this attack was intended to send a clear message: that theft and corruption will continue to be tolerated and that no one should dare to oppose it.” He added: “I got that message, but I will continue my journalistic work exactly where I left off, with even more determination. This attack was aimed at silencing us, but we would not remain silent. We will raise our voices even louder and continue our work undeterred.”

### **The background of this attack**

Aygül said that Tatvan is a small town where people know each other and added: “How dare they carry out such an attack? So obvious and blatant. In the past, I have reported on far larger and more serious cases of corruption and dealt with far more dangerous individuals. But so far no one has dared to do such a thing. They made a mistake. They didn’t realize where their actions would lead. That’s one aspect. The other aspect is that those who stood behind them gave them appropriate assurances. The attackers were assured that no one could harm them. This fact must not be ignored either.”

### **“They attacked with intent to kill”**

Aygül does not consider the attack as a simple threat, but as an attempted murder. He said: “They hit me on the head from behind with a crowbar. Both the crowbar and brass knuckles were in their possession. So their goal was clearly to kill me. Far from being an act of intimidation, it was undoubtedly attempted murder. The attack happened right after the publication of my last feature about the city government. The masterminds of this attack were the mayor’s bodyguards, their closest associates and their relatives. The person behind this attack must be extremely influential as one of the perpetrators was a police officer and the other was a city official. These people put their own lives and jobs at risk. The mastermind of this action is therefore an important personality. We will track this person down.”

### **“This country is hell for journalists”**

Aygül said that the lack of freedom of the press is, unfortunately, “not a new problem. Over the past 20 years, restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of expression have reached levels comparable to those in other dictatorial countries. All laws passed since then do not advocate journalism and freedom of information, but work against them. It’s about restricting, controlling and censoring the press. The population’s right to information is being eroded. The most recent censorship law is particularly problematic. I am the first and so far only journalist to have been arrested and convicted under this law. These laws empower government agencies and their corrupt networks. If there were a free press in a truly democratic environment, such machinations would not be possible in such a bold way. Unfortunately, however, that is not the case. Working as a journalist in Turkey and Kurdistan means risking your life. Unfortunately, dozens of colleagues have been murdered here in the history of this country’s press. Hundreds of our colleagues have already been subjected to violence and have been beaten in the streets. Hundreds of our friends are still in prison. Freedom of the press doesn’t exist here. Unfortunately, this country is hell for journalists.”



## United in the search for justice

ANF | URFA | 4 JULY 2023

Families of those who lost their lives in the bomb attack carried out by ISIS on 20 July 2015 at the Amara Cultural Center in Suruç (Pirsûs), injured survivors in the massacre, lawyers from the Justice for Suruç Platform, Green Left Party Urfa (Riha) MP Dilan Kunt Ayan, Socialist Youth Associations Federation (SGDF), visited Emine Şenyaşar who has been holding a Vigil for Justice for 834 days.

### ‘We are looking for justice’

Speaking during the visit, Dilek Şeker, daughter of İsmet Şeker, who lost his life in the Suruç massacre, said that Suruç families have been seeking justice for 8 years and added: “For 8 years, we have said ‘Justice for Suruç, justice for everyone’. We will say this again today. The Şenyaşar family lost their children just like us. Our children are imprisoned. We came from Istanbul by driving 15 hours today. Is there justice? No. But we are seeking justice. We are always on the side of families who want justice. We are not afraid.”

### ‘Solidarity will continue’

Green Left Party Urfa MP, Ferit Şenyaşar, said: “The people who came to Suruç were our guests. We will continue our solidarity with the families until justice is provided and the real perpetrators are tried.”

### ‘Search for justice brings us together’

Yasemin Boyraz, who lost her mother Nazegül Bahar Boyraz in the Suruç massacre, said: “We have been the victims of one of the heaviest massacres in Turkey. I do not know Kurdish, and Emine Şenyaşar does not speak Turkish. But justice brings us together. We will continue to seek justice in court. We will always show solidarity.”

After staying at the vigil with the family for a while, the delegation went to the courthouse to attend the 4th hearing of the ongoing case against the fugitive suspects in the Suruç massacre.

### Justice Vigil for 834 days

On 14 June 2018, the bodyguards and relatives of AKP Urfa MP İbrahim Halil Yıldız attacked the Şenyaşar family's shop in Suruç during the election campaign.

In the attack, brothers Celal, Adil, Mehmet, Fadıl and Ferit Şenyaşar were severely injured and hospitalized. Relatives and supporters of AKP MP Yıldız killed Celal and Adil Şenyaşar in hospital, and their father Hacı Esvet Şenyaşar, when he went to the hospital to see his sons. He was brutally murdered, being lynched in front of his wife, Emine Şenyaşar.

Emine Şenyaşar and her son Ferit have been holding a Justice Vigil in front of the Courthouse of Urfa since 9 March 2021, demanding those responsible to be brought to account.

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## Turkish poet Ahmet Telli sentenced to ten months in prison for “terror propaganda”

ANF | ANKARA | 4 JULY 2023

Turkish poet Ahmet Telli has been sentenced to ten months in prison in Ankara for "terror propaganda". The background to the criminal proceedings was a rally on 11 May 2017 at which Telli spoke and recited one of his poems, over which the prosecution demanded eight years in prison for the 76-year-old poet.

The trial at the 26th Heavy Penal Court in Ankara was observed by the Science, Art and Literature Association, the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) and the Human Rights Association IHD. More than fifty observers from home and abroad took part on the last day of the trial.

Ahmet Telli said after the prosecution's plea that he had taken part in the criminalised rally out of his responsibility as an intellectual. "My intention was to recite a poem. As an intellectual, I have participated in social causes before, that is my responsibility," Telli said, demanding acquittal.

The poet's lawyer, Umut Vedat Acar, echoed the demand, pointing out that 75 other defendants had already gone unpunished in connection with the rally because no criminal offence had been committed. The court did not agree with this argumentation, but the execution of the prison sentence was suspended.

The rally in Ankara took place after the death of Ulaş Bayraktaroğlu in Rojava. The internationalist from Turkey was a commander of the United Freedom Forces (Birleşik Özgürlük Güçleri, BÖG) and died in May 2017 in Raqqa fighting ISIS. Telli had spoken at the rally about the fraternity of peoples.

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## Lavrio Camp stormed, refugees forcibly evacuated by the Greek police

ANF | LAVRIO | 5 JULY 2023

According to reports, hundreds of police raided the Lavrio refugee camp at 4 am local time today.

Around 40 people staying in the camp were detained and transferred to another camp. Police broke the doors of the rooms during the raid, which was met with reactions from Greek civil society organizations.

Activists announced in a press statement at the Kurdish Cultural Center that following the raid by hundreds of police, refugees were forced onto buses and forcibly evacuated.

The Kurdish Cultural Center condemned the raid, which, it said, took place as a result of negotiations with the Turkish state and NATO.

The Greek Ministry of Migration claimed that the refugees left the camp voluntarily. The Kurdish Cultural Center denied the statement and said it was rather a forced evacuation.

The raid came after the new right-wing Greek government vowed a few days ago to start over from scratch in its relations with Turkey.

The next NATO summit to be held in Vilnius, Lithuania, from 11 to 12 July will also discuss the Turkish veto of Sweden's NATO membership over conditions against the Kurds.

Lavrio is a town in the Greek province of Attica, about 60 kilometres south of Athens. It is home to one of the oldest refugee camps in Greece. Built in the 1960s for Cold War refugees from the Soviet Union, in the 1980s it was mainly political refugees from Turkey who had escaped the military coup there. Lavrio has since been known as a reception centre for Kurdish refugees and has always been a thorn in Ankara's side. From 2014 onwards, more Kurdish families from Rojava/Northern Syria came to Lavrio, fleeing the attacks of the Islamic State (IS). Most recently, they made up the majority of the residents, but Kurds from Bakur, Rojhilat and Bashur also lived in the camp.

Until a few years ago, the camp was officially recognised by Athens and was run with the help of the Greek Red Cross. But in 2017, the Syriza government surprisingly withdrew state support from the camp. Since then, Lavrio has been a kind of self-administration zone, financed by donations, including from the Kurdish Red Crescent (Heyva Sor a Kurdistanê). The self-administration of the camp worked according to the principle of Democratic Autonomy. There were committees for security, cleanliness, health, women, youth and administration.

With Lavrio, something unique was created throughout Europe. The population of the town of Lavrio with about 25,000 inhabitants showed solidarity with the people in the camp, brought food and other donations in kind, and bought their cigarettes in the morning in the small kiosk that the camp ran.



## Hearing of journalists in Ankara adjourned until October 26

ANF | ANKARA | 5 JULY 2023

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranks Turkey 165th out of 180 countries on its press freedom list, and the pressure on journalists continues. In addition to censorship and repression, 79 media professionals are imprisoned in Turkish jails for their professional activities, according to the latest report by the Dicle Firat Journalists' Association (DFG).

Media professionals working in the tradition of the "Free Press" are the ones who suffer the most from the AKP policy of censorship and repression. In recent weeks, DFG co-chair Dicle Müftüoğlu, Abdurrahman Gök, Sedat Yılmaz and Mehmet Şah Oruç of the Mezopotamya Agency (MA), JinNews reporter Beritan Canözer and journalists Mikail Barut and Remzi Akkaya were imprisoned.

Journalists Diren Yurtsever, Selman Güzelyüz, Deniz Nazlım, Berivan Altan, Emrullah Acar, Hakan Yalçın, Ceylan Şahinli, Zemo Ağgöz, Habibe Eren and Öznur Değer, who were detained on 25 October 2022 and jailed on 29 October as part of an investigation by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office for "membership of an illegal organisation", were released on the first day of the trial at the Ankara 4th Heavy Penal Court on 16 May. Journalist Hamdullah Bayram, detained in the same investigation on 16 March 2023, remains in pre-trial detention.

The second hearing in the case against Mezopotamya News Agency editor Diren Yurtsever, Mezopotamya reporters Berivan Altan, Ceylan Şahinli, Deniz Nazlım, Emrullah Acar, Hakan Yalçın, Salman Güzelyüz, and Zemo Ağgöz Yiğitsoy, freelance journalist Öznur Değer, JİNNEWS reporter Ümmü Habibe Eren and former MA reporting intern Mehmet Günhan was held at Ankara 4th Heavy Penal Court today.

The trial was attended by some of the journalists on trial, and monitored by the Association of Lawyers for Freedom (ÖHD), Association of Contemporary Lawyers (ÇHD), Human Rights Association (IHD) and the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA).

Zemo Ağgöz remarked that the suit brought against them was not independent of the political atmosphere in Turkey. Pointing to the accounts by so-called witnesses, Ağgöz said: "Our journalism and the agency we work for stand trial on the grounds of baseless allegations, because of which I could not breastfeed my baby for 45 days during detention and because of which I have been brought here with my 10-month-old baby today."

The court then listened to the secret witness "K8Ç4B3L1T5" who repeated his previous statement at the prosecution office.

The secret witness said that he did not have concrete information to provide for many of the questions addressed to him. He confessed to having engaged in activities of the MA on behalf of the state. Ferhat Çelik, concessionaire of the Mezopotamya News Agency, was heard as a witness through the Audio and Visual Information System (SEGBİS) and pointed out that they did rights-based journalism.

The court board ruled for the continuation of judicial control over the journalists on trial and rejected the request for the return of the confiscated digital material. The hearing was adjourned until October 26.

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## ENAG: Inflation in Turkey at over 108 per cent

ANF | 5 JULY 2023

Turkey's high inflation rate has slowed down, according to government data. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the increase in consumer prices fell from 39.6 per cent in May to 38.2 per cent in June. This was the second consecutive month since the beginning of 2022 that the official inflation rate was below the 40 per cent mark. Last October, the inflation rate reached a 24-year record of 85.5 per cent, but it has been declining since then.

However, independent experts doubt the official inflation data. The regime-independent research group ENAG, based in Istanbul, estimates that inflation is more than twice as high. For May, it gave an inflation rate of 105.2 per cent, and in June it rose to 108.6 per cent. According to ENAG, its calculations are based on the same figures as those of the state statistics authority. These are derived from the trade in goods and services in Turkey.

Among the biggest price drivers are food and non-alcoholic beverages, which cost almost 54 per cent more than in June 2022. The Turkish central bank initiated a turnaround in monetary policy last month under its new head, Hafize Gaye Erkan, due to the sharp rise in prices. The key interest rate was raised from 8.5 to 15.0 per cent, while at the same time further increases were signalled.

The inflation target of five per cent remains a long way off. The inflation problems are also aggravated by the devaluation of the lira. Since the beginning of the year, the Turkish currency has lost more than 30 per cent of its value against the dollar. Turkey is a country poor in raw materials and has to import many goods that become more expensive due to the weak lira.

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## Court rejects inspection of the scene where Tahir Elçi was murdered

ANF | AMED | 5 JULY 2023

In the trial over the killing in 2015 of the Kurdish human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi, a criminal court in Diyarbakır (kr: Amed) rejected a request by the joint prosecution for a new visit to the crime scene. Such an out-of-town visit to reenact the crime was not necessary at the moment, the presiding judge of the 10th Heavy Penal Court in Diyarbakır said at the seventh main hearing on Wednesday. The court will first

await a report from the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) on surveillance videos from a restaurant at the crime scene, as well as presumably deleted footage from police video documentation.

In October 2020, police officers Sinan Tabur, Fuat Tan ve Mesut Sevgi were charged with “involuntary manslaughter” in relation to the murder of Elçi. A sentence of between two and six years is demanded for the officers, who are still on duty today and do not have to appear in court in person but attend it via video conferencing system.

With Uğur Yakışır, a former YPS (Civil Defense Units) member who is alleged to have shot two police officers in the immediate vicinity on the day of Elçi’s death, a fourth person is also charged in the trial. For him, the prosecution is demanding three life sentences each plus an additional 45 years in prison for the “murder of Tahir Elçi”, the “murder of two police officers” and the attempted destruction of the unity and integrity of the state - although it has been proven that he did not shoot Elçi. Yakışır has also not appeared in court so far. He joined the guerrilla ranks in 2016.

At today’s trial, the lawyers filed another motion for evidence, seeking to have several officers of the police intelligence service, who had overheard Uğur Yakışır and another YPS member by phone since 2014, heard as witnesses. This request was also rejected by the court. The trial will continue on 29 November 2023.

## **28 November 2015: A planned murder**

On 14 October 2015, Tahir Elçi participated in the ‘Neutral Zone’ program presented by Ahmet Hakan at CNN Türk. Asked by Hakan whether the PKK was a terrorist organization, Elçi answered: “The PKK is not a terrorist organization”.

After this program, the prestigious lawyer was exposed to an increasingly common lynching. Six days after the CNN Turk program, Elçi was taken into custody at the Amed Bar Association’s legal aid building and taken to Istanbul for testimony. He was released after his testimony: he was to undergo judicial control and was forbidden to go abroad.

On 28 November 2015, Tahir Elçi was shot and killed during a press conference in the city of Diyarbakır in south-east Turkey. It was 10.53 when Elçi was shot at the Four Legged Minaret with a bullet in the back of his neck.

At the press conference, Elçi had appealed for calm in the city, amid a recent wave of violence. The weeks and months following his death, however, saw an escalation in the conflict that resulted in the near-total destruction of Diyarbakır’s historic centre, Sur, a historic resistance, the deaths of hundreds of civilians and the displacement of thousands more.

In a public address on the day of the murder, then Turkey’s Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, pledged to apprehend the “unknown perpetrators”, and promised that the state’s investigation would uncover the truth. “Politically-motivated assassinations”, he added, “would not be tolerated”.

Yet why was the PM delivering his speech, promising to catch the killers, while the authorities were failing (was it deliberate? One cannot but think it was, unfortunately) to secure or process the crime scene. They blamed the ongoing clashes in the area, and when investigators returned two days later and began collecting evidence, their work lasted very little.

In the end, the investigators gathered 43 pieces of evidence that had previously been identified and labelled for collection. Forty further pieces, from the area immediately around the base of the minaret, where Elçi was murdered, were not collected. Photographs and footage show civilians walking around the murder scene, which was clearly compromised.

Indeed, the bullet that killed Elçi was never recovered. It was only four months later, in March 2016, that investigators returned to carry out a new two-day examination of the murder scene.

Possibly even more disturbing was the fact that the police officers who could clearly be seen firing their weapons in Elçi's direction at the press conference were never questioned as potential suspects, only as witnesses.

### **London University report: Police shot Elçi**

Later in 2016, the Diyarbakır Bar Association commissioned London university Goldsmiths research group Forensic Architecture to examine the evidence in their possession. That included witness testimony, video footage, photographs and material from the crime scene investigation, and official and independent reports.

One of the first accusations made by the government was that, in fact, Elçi had been killed by PKK militants who were armed at the scene that day.

However, Forensic Architecture dismissed this claim with a rigorous reconstruction of what happened that day. The report said: "The results of our analysis confirm with near-certainty that neither of the PKK militants could have fired the shot that killed Elçi. In fact, for much of the time frame during which Elçi was hit, Gürkan was clearly holding his gun by the barrel, and thus unable to shoot. Yakışır does not appear to aim at Elçi at any point during the time frame, and eventually throws his gun at the police."

Forensic Architecture then concluded: "Based on our analysis, we concluded that police officers A and D had directly but partially obstructed lines of fire towards Elçi during the period in which they were visibly firing their weapons. Either could therefore have fired the fatal shot.

Police officer C is the only officer to have had a clear unobstructed line of sight towards Tahir Elçi, during the period in which he fired shots 24, 26, 28, and 29. He too could have fired the fatal shot."

### **Was Elçi given medical attention?**

According to Forensic Architecture, "following the shooting, one of the four cameras continued to record for around 13 minutes. Throughout this time, as shots rang out intermittently from nearby streets, Elçi's body lay on the ground unattended; nobody in the vicinity attempted to check his condition, or to give him medical attention. [...] 12 minutes and 30 seconds after the end of the investigative time frame – an

armoured vehicle arrives, parking just centimetres from Elçi's body. Shortly afterward, the camera stops recording."

### **Forensic Architecture: PKK militant can not be responsible for Elçi's death**

On the eve of the reopening of the hearing on 3 March 2021, Forensic Architecture shared a tweet in which it said that "there is a problem with the indictment. In addition to the police officers we identified, one of the PKK members is also cited as Elçi's murder suspect. However, our findings clearly showed that PKK members did not shoot Elçi."

The results of Forensic Architecture's analysis confirmed with near-certainty that neither of the PKK militants could have fired the shot that killed Elçi. In fact, for much of the time frame during which Elçi was hit, Gürkan was clearly holding his gun by the barrel, and thus unable to shoot. Yakışır does not appear to aim at Elçi at any point during the time frame, and eventually throws his gun at the police.

In February 2019, Forensic Architecture published an extended report on their investigation through openDemocracy, exploring in depth some of the wider context behind Elçi's death, and their investigation.

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## **Police raid HDP office in Istanbul**

ANF | ISTANBUL | 6 JULY 2023

The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in the Esenyurt district of Istanbul was raided by police on Thursday. A special counter-terrorism unit stormed and ransacked the premises in the morning. The street where the building is located was cordoned off beforehand. According to the HDP office, no reason was given for the raid.

The executive committee of the HDP in Esenyurt criticised the raid on their association as an "illegal act of the AKP/MHP regime". The party said that the police had turned the offices into a debris field and destroyed numerous objects. Among them were flags and banners of the HDP, its sister party Green Left Party and the Labour and Freedom Alliance, which were torn up, as well as photos of Deniz Poyraz and Kemal Kurkut.

Kemal Kurkut was shot dead by a police officer in Amed (tr. Diyarbakır) in 2017 on the sidelines of Newroz celebrations. Deniz Poyraz was murdered in 2021 in an attack on an HDP office in Izmir by an avowed fascist.

The police also damaged the library of the HDP Esenyurt office and hundreds of books were thrown on the floor. In addition, the officers confiscated several pictures with the portrait of the Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan. The co-chairs of the district association announced that they would file charges against the responsible police officers.

The HDP's representation in Esenyurt is a permanent focus of the Turkish police authorities. Last January, several members of the executive committee made public that they had been coerced into informing through attempts at bribery and blackmail. On several occasions, rallies in front of the building were broken up by force, including in September when a statement demanding Kurdish-language education was to be made.

The last raid on the building took place in January 2021 when the then co-chair of the HDP Esenyurt organization, Ercan Sağlam, was imprisoned for alleged "PKK membership". The basis of the accusation was a mural of Abdullah Öcalan in the local association's premises, photos of which had surfaced on online networks a week ago after the building was disinfected by local municipal personnel.

Ercan Sağlam sharply criticized the actions of the Turkish security authorities after his detention, calling them illegal. He said it was not the mural that was against the law, but the search of the HDP association, which had been carried out without a court order. According to rulings by the Turkish Constitutional Court, images with the PKK founder's likeness or slogans such as "Bijî Serok Apo" are not unconstitutional.



## German police raid Kurdish Community Centre in Heilbronn

ANF | HEILBRONN | 6 JULY 2023

German police raided the Kurdish Community Centre in Heilbronn on Thursday. The police reportedly broke open the doors and searched all the rooms, sometimes without witnesses being present. Various objects and association documents were also confiscated, according to the executive committee.

The reason for the search of the Kurdish association in Heilbronn is apparently a preliminary investigation into an alleged violation of the law on associations in connection with the ban on activities against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) imposed in 1993. Around the same time, the flats of the former co-chairpersons of the community centre were also searched by the police.



## Interview

## Russia uses Erdoğan as a means of pressure

Journalist Yusuf Karadaş analyses that Turkey serves Russia mainly as a tool to put pressure on Rojava. Russia is trying to make an agreement between the regime and Rojava more difficult and at the same time build up pressure on the USA.

ANF | 1 JULY 2023

On 11 and 12 July, the NATO summit will take place in Vilnius, Lithuania, in a confrontation with Russia. While the Western military alliance focuses on unity, member state Turkey acts between the power blocs Russia and NATO and tries to push through its own expansionist interests. Journalist Yusuf Karadaş, who writes for the left-wing newspaper Evrensel, analyses the foreign policy of the newly elected old Turkish government and its relationship with NATO and Russia in an interview with ANF.

*Turkey is using the contradictions between the USA and Russia to strengthen its own expansionism. At the upcoming NATO summit, the US is expected to ask Turkey to approve Sweden's membership. How do you see the developments?*

As you know, this debate was originally about the membership of Finland and Sweden. The Ukraine-Russia war has allowed countries that we thought might not apply for NATO membership to also decide to become NATO members because of the resulting security concerns and threat scenario. This was the planned policy of the USA anyway. In this context, Finland and Sweden applied for NATO membership. As is known, Finland's application was approved by Erdoğan and the Turkish parliament in March after Turkey's conditions were met. Of course, it must be said that Erdoğan's government tried to use Finland's and Sweden's membership applications as a means to gain its own advantages.

*What did the Turkish government want to gain for itself? What was it all about?*

Turkey tried to involve NATO in its war against the Kurds in Rojava and at least to get them and the USA to agree to an operation that it would carry out itself. When it did not achieve what it wanted, Turkey tried to negotiate with Finland and Sweden to have "terror" laws passed there and, above all, Kurds extradited to Turkey. After Finland, negotiations are now continuing with Sweden. Sweden has also passed a new terror law. Here, too, it is of course important to point out that the adoption of these laws by these states should not be seen merely as a concession to the Erdoğan regime.

*Why?*

The fact that these countries, which call themselves the cradle of democracy, have accepted terror laws as a result of such a deal should be seen as an expression of their own tendency towards increasingly reactionary policies. It is a politics that is prepared to use these laws against its own people. It is not just about negotiating with Erdoğan. It is about a reactionary attitude that undermines democratic achievements.

Furthermore, we must address the fact that the Erdoğan government, especially after the elections and in the context of the appointment of Mehmet Şimşek as Minister of Economy, is trying to adopt a more harmonious and acceptable position towards the West, the US and NATO.

With regard to the NATO issue, Biden's congratulatory phone call with Erdoğan, in particular, in which he expressed his demand for Turkish consent to Sweden's NATO accession, and the NATO Secretary General's participation in Erdoğan's ceremony, where he also met with Hakan Fidan [new foreign minister, former intelligence chief] and the new defence minister Yaşar Güler, can be seen as the first steps of a new negotiation process with the Western powers.

*And will this process go as desired?*

Although the Erdoğan government will probably continue to negotiate here, it will have to accept Sweden's NATO membership in some way. A pillar of this negotiation process is also the sale of F-16 aircraft by the US to Turkey. Whether it will happen at the NATO summit or not, this negotiation process will bring a result as a result of the talks between the leaders, even though it may not be achieved until after the summit. Therefore, I think Erdoğan will use this step to renew his relations with the Western powers in a certain way. Of course, you can also see that Erdoğan is trying not to get into an open contradiction with Russia. This is also a background for Turkey's contradictions. It wants to show Russia that it opposes NATO and wants to maintain its relations with Russia.

*Can this be defined as a policy of balance between the powers?*

It cannot be called a policy of balance. It is about exploiting the contradiction between the power blocs as much as possible for their own interests. It is not a policy of balance, because Turkey also tries to exploit contradictions, but is forced to make more and more concessions depending on the situation. At some points, Turkey has been forced to take steps backwards, and these points are increasing. The most concrete example of this we see in Turkey's relations with Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Recently, Erdoğan openly declared these states to be coup plotters, financiers of the 15 July [2016 military coup attempt in Turkey] or murderers, but then he had to return to them in the course of a policy of concessions in the sense of normalising relations.

The Astana talks are a negotiation process between Syria, Russia, Turkey and Iran, with Russia at the centre. These talks are ongoing, and as far as the balance of power in Syria is concerned, this is a point that Russia has made a subject of negotiation in order to keep Turkey in a position where it can do as little as possible against Russia. The most important pillar of this agreement is directed against the Kurds in Syria. Russia knows that the Erdoğan government sees Kurdish achievements as a threat, considers violence as a means to solve the Kurdish question and therefore wants to continue its policy of aggression against Rojava. Russia is giving Erdoğan the opportunity to build up pressure on the Kurds in its own interest. This is because Russia itself wants to increase the pressure on them and force them to compromise with Assad and play the USA and Turkey off against each other in the field. For this reason, Russia turns a blind eye to attacks by Turkish armed drones, even if it does not open the way for Turkey to directly invade.

*The intelligence chief, Hakan Fidan, was appointed foreign minister. Is this a sign of political change or does it represent continuity?*

It is indeed necessary to discuss this in the context of the time when Hakan Fidan became head of MIT. Because in 2007, when MIT constituted a so-called "proactive foreign policy", Hakan Fidan was at the centre of this process, first as deputy undersecretary of MIT and then as director of the intelligence agency. This proactive foreign policy was put into practice everywhere Turkey struggled for hegemony and the dis-



tribution of resources - in the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Balkans. The MIT took an active role in this by being placed in a position as an interventionist force participating in operations in the interests of the ruling classes in Turkey. When this policy was established, Hakan Fidan was first deputy and then chief. Therefore, Hakan Fidan is a symbol of the policy of that time. This is important here. Erdoğan refers to him as his “secre”. The fact that he has now become foreign minister and Erdoğan’s deputy in charge of foreign policy is a sign that, as when he came to head MIT, he will continue this policy in this area. But although this is meant to sell a success story, a large part of the operations carried out during Fidan's tenure have in fact failed.

*What are they?*

These range from the sending of the Mavi Marmara ship to Gaza to the intervention policy in Syria and Iraq. The fact that the MIT was not able to keep the talks secret during the negotiation process of the Kurdish question is also no credit. What is most often presented as a success is the use of jihadist organisations and armed drones to balance Libya. On the other hand, the positioning on the side of Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh war in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict can also be considered. This actually served Russia’s interests. By suppressing Armenia, Russia’s control was restored. By pushing back General Haftar in Libya, the interests of the USA were served. This intervention enabled the US and the Western powers to get the United Nations active there again. So, actually, this success story can only be read as an apparent profit from contradictions. Actually, it only served the interests of the imperialists. Although the Erdoğan government is trying to present itself as a game changer with these interventions, the real game changers and those who have been able to use these operations for their policies are others.

Therefore, I think that this policy will continue to be based on using contradictions for its own expansionist ambitions whenever the government finds the opportunity, on the one hand, and making concessions whenever it is forced to do so, on the other. In this respect, there will be no particular change with Fidan as foreign minister. However, this policy is neither anti-imperialist, as it is propagated, nor in the interests of the peoples of Turkey. On the contrary, it is a policy that plunges Turkey into more violence and crises, in line with the interests of the ruling classes in Turkey.

*After all, the government campaigned with war, threats of invasion and armament. What remains of this?*

Although the government is trying to sell a success story, as Erdoğan has regained both the parliamentary majority and the presidency, it is obvious that this is once again a debacle comparable to the 2019 local elections, in which the AKP lost several major cities. Therefore, we can already say that the government will continue the policy of tension, especially in view of the upcoming local elections. The new legislative period will be very difficult for the people, especially because of Mehmet Şimşek's economic policies. The working class will face more poverty, lower wages and even more unemployment. This also points to a time when violence and oppression will continue to increase. If we look at the world political situation, we see that major powers that are supposed to be against such regimes are cooperating with these regimes. The West is criticising the Erdoğan government not because it is repressive, but because it is not cooperating sufficiently. Because, as I said at the beginning, the question must be raised to what extent the West is realising its own democratic principles today. Reactionary politics are on the rise throughout Europe and the USA. The bourgeoisie has mobilised these forces. For them, the most important question is how compatible Erdoğan is with them. This development will shape the situation in the world in the period ahead. The

struggle between these forces will inevitably have an impact on Erdoğan's policies in Syria, the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. It may soon be possible to analyse this in more detail.

Perhaps the NATO summit will offer signs of how the new phase will be shaped. The extent to which the announced steps towards the normalisation process with Syria are taken or not will be one of the indicators. But what we can already tell is that the coming phase will not be an easy time for the Erdoğan government and for the forces fighting for hegemony through the Ukrainian-Russian war. But this is also true for us and for the forces of labour and democracy. A period of increasing repression against the Kurdish people, the democratic forces in Turkey and the working class is coming. This is to keep them under control. At the same time, of course, these challenges will bring new opportunities for struggle. Therefore, I think that the attitude of the working people, our peoples and the political forces and alliances will be crucial in finding an answer to the question of what the future of the country and the region will be.

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## Two labour unions, one common struggle

ANF | 2 JULY 2023

According to the reports published by the Occupational Health and Safety Council (ISIG), in the first five months of 2023, 118 workers lost their lives in workplace homicides in the construction and road industry.

In 2022, 843 workers fell victim to workplace homicides, 374 of them (20 percent) in the construction and road sector. The construction industry has one of the most precarious working conditions in Turkey. Precarious work has become systematic for workers in this sector, which became the main economic sector after the AKP and Erdogan came to power. The construction sector, which offers short-term contracts and worker circulation, is very difficult in terms of union organization. Therefore, the rights and working conditions of the workers are often not a priority.

Despite all these difficulties, the Dev Yapı-İş Union affiliated to DİSK and the independent İnşaat İş Union are carrying out many actions together. These two unions, which organize strikes and struggles at the construction sites, voice the demands of the workers for shelter, food, overtime, wages and many other issues.

At a time when the unions are subjected to severe criticism, ANF talked to the Dev Yapı-İş Union and the İnşaat İş Union about the working conditions in the construction sector, as well as the forms of organization and actions. In the first part of this interview, General Secretary of Dev Yapı-İş Union Nihat Demir answered ANF's questions.

*Organizing in the construction sector is extremely difficult. Because this sector has its own unique conditions. How do you manage to organize?*

There is always a spontaneous organization in the construction sector in general, because there are serious violations of rights. Yes, it is difficult to organize because many of the workers come from other provinces,

especially from Kurdish provinces. They stay in camps and construction sites. When they don't receive their salary, they have no place to go.

*In general, what are the working conditions at the construction sites?*

We are in the 21st century, we are in 2023, but the state's own laws are not still in force in the construction sites. Severance and notice pay, and overtimes are not paid. Workers have their daily salary reduced or not paid at all. Salaries are paid with a delay of 2-3 months. Workers work long hours and being paid late, increasing their problems. Moreover, workers are often victims of work-related accidents because they are working when they are tired and exhausted. Due to the acceleration of production, many of our friends fell at the construction sites. Some suffer from heart attack caused by fatigue. Many of our friends died in the workplace.

*So, what about organization in union activities?*

Before the 80s, there was a serious organization and union in the construction sector. The workers knew about the unions. But since there was no serious union movement or union struggle in the construction sector after 1980, there was no union in the minds of workers. Sometimes workers ask questions like 'what is a union, do they pay more?' Funny questions like this can be posed to us.

*You said that most of the workers don't live here. So, what exactly is the definition of worker in this industry?*

I can say that there are mostly younger workers in construction, there are many university and high school students. There are those dismissed by governmental decrees (KHK), there are teachers who wait for government appointment. Construction is a difficult sector, and it is necessary to have experience and skills to work in this field. It is a job that requires strength and power. Because a worker without a background in construction can easily fall, for example.

*You came here after visiting a worker at the hospital who fell from a site...*

Yes, a colleague of ours, who works at Emlak Konut in Fikirtepe urban transformation project fell from the 11th floor and luckily he is still alive. It is truly a miracle! He is currently in Göztepe Hospital. Fortunately, he is alive but he was seriously injured, and he may not return to a normal life. Maybe he will no longer be able to walk. He won't be able to work like he used to and he's only 20 years old! Hundreds of people have died; thousands of people have become disabled due to gross neglect of construction, and most of them are young people.

*Which neglects do you encounter the most?*

Most of the time, there are housing and food problems. From time to time, we stage effective actions to protest these shortages. We voiced our demands by storming the cafeteria. Then they changed conditions completely. For example, we had a few such actions in Kalyon and in the Renaissance. After our actions, the food problem was solved. We are constantly making improvements in housing and food, yet two days later we get back to square one. Because there is a circulation of workers. It's something in the nature of the business. It's a temporary job.

The construction process is also problematic. In order to be fast, for example, the workers have to finish huge buildings in four or five years. In fact, it would take longer to finish them. Compared to the past, the current projects offer buildings which are a little more resistant to earthquakes, but there are many risks because there are a lot of neglect and materials are stolen or ignored.

*How is occupational safety inspected at construction sites?*

Unfortunately, because occupational safety institutions receive money from the boss and there is no separate control mechanism, it is reduced to whatever the boss says. The safety of workers is not only provided with safety hats or shoes. Shelter and food must be good, and there must be nets and protection all over the building. There is no full protection and job security anywhere. I couldn't find any. For example, although it is prohibited, workers are subjected to salary deductions after they are given a fully-protected suit. In this sense, there is a lack of organization and, unfortunately, we cannot deal with all cases.

*How many construction workers are there in Istanbul?*

It is difficult to give an exact number, but there are almost two million construction workers. Of course, we do not count workers without papers. There are also a lot of refugees.

*Are workers familiar with the actions of the two unions?*

When there is a joint struggle of the two unions in this field, the voice of the workers can be heard in a better way by society. Workers can now say that they have a union and are no longer alone. Every action leads to another action. The reason we succeeded in all actions is that we never look down on any worker because we are also construction workers. We know that the problems cannot be resolved at the negotiation table, without strikes and struggle. The spirit of common struggle should conquest the streets. We are talking and discussing how we can solve problems in the fastest way without making workers suffer more. Because all these workers are coming from different regions of the country, and they rely on daily wages. If they are fired, they have nobody to go and ask for help.

Of course, we are still angry because we are constantly dying on construction sites. However, we don't bow to the bosses. Whatever the case, if a worker has a problem, we do not leave him alone without resolving it. Workers also realize that they can achieve something if they struggle in this way, organize and go on strike. In the last week, we did three or four demonstrations in Fikirtepe and we succeeded in all of them.

The area we are struggling in is a difficult area. Bosses openly say that they are “the state” and threaten us. We have been threatened many times. Now, none of the managers of both unions have any real security of life. But we are not afraid. That's why we're not going to take a step back. No matter how many threats we receive, our struggle will continue.

## Dev Yapı İş and İnşaat İş unions: We fight against conditions of slavery at construction sites

ANF | 3 JULY 2023

In the second part of the feature about Dev Yapı İş and İnşaat İş unions, which are very active in the construction sector, ANF talked with Deniz Gider from İnşaat İş trade union about the usurpation of rights and working conditions in the construction sector.

*The two unions have an area of organization that you run jointly. Can you tell us about it?*

Construction is a very tough sector marked by circulation rather than continuity. For example, an area that can be completed in 10 years is done in 5 years with an incredible change in workers. As a matter of fact, our understanding of union is different from that of a metal factory, a textile workshop or a textile factory, shipyard or mine. We are proceeding with a more urgent vision of struggle, so to speak. Because the rights of the working class, which we can only call crumbs, are in question in the constitution. But even these are not applied in our sector. For example, in these construction sites, the salary of the worker is very very low, the rest is given by hand. Secondly, there is a lot of usurpation of rights. In fact, rights are stolen both from the worker's life and his money. What we have to do here is to say that we have our own laws and struggle against theirs. In other words, we have practices such as not only standing in front of the construction site and shouting slogans, but also chaining that door if necessary, chaining yourself there, protesting in the most unlikely places or wherever there are construction sites. We have a tradition and a history here, such as closing the Bosphorus Bridge to traffic if necessary.

As to our policy, we don't consider our job done just by affiliate members. If you have class consciousness, if you are sincere about it, first you have to establish a human connection with the worker. That's how it is in our industry. Let's say we have two unions today and we have 10 thousand members, but tomorrow this number will decrease. Because the workers come and go in our sector. If I get up here and say that I will get "affiliations" on the back of the worker for membership, and if I lean on my unionism here, I will only become a yellow union. Today, there is something more important than that money, and that is the worker's understanding of an organized militant struggle. Otherwise, there are fascist and yellow unions such as Hak-İş and Türk-İş saying that they are dealing with the minimum wage while they condemn workers to misery.

On the other hand, if the head of a union branch or the general chair of a union, or an official of the department, receives as much salary as a worker, this is reasonable. But if you receive 70, 80, 90 thousand liras, 100 thousand liras, you are already alienated. We reject this notion. Because it means that he no longer has contact with the worker with that number.

*How are you received or known by the workers?*

When we go to a construction site with Dev Yapı İş, they are waiting for us to appear in suits. However, we wear jeans, our shoes are torn, sunk in the mud or we already have yellow boots on the construction sites. As a matter of fact, the worker recognises you from there. We are in the age of communica-

tion. Workers comment on the posts we share on social media, for example. They see us as one of their people.

*You give some confidence, don't you?*

Of course, it's not really about the suit. I want to talk about this. The minimum wage is now 11,402 liras. Today, rents in metropolises are 15-16,000 liras. So a minimum wage earner cannot live here. This is also the case at construction sites. This man is from another region, he gets paid little money, he has to make a living here and send money to the family. Therefore, when we generalize, our understanding of the union must be from the perspective of a militant and struggling class.

The other issue is that there are too many deaths at construction sites and we cannot keep up with them. Because we don't have the strength.

*You are being detained for your actions or the police are crowding in front of the construction site. For example, do these intimidate workers?*

The battle is fierce and we are dealing with vultures. These bosses are not the kind of men who play okay in the cafe. These are the mafia! They say 'I want to build here, take his permission and plunder'. These bosses are destroying nature, animals and our living space. When a worker goes to his door to demand his rights, the police are there.

It's not just a matter of rights. Everyone has a life. We all have concerns about the future. But workers on the construction sites have no life at all. Working hours are impossible and the job itself is very hard. So, after a day shift, all they can do is going to sleep.

There have been many protests and we have been detained and beaten up. For example, we organized a protest at the airport. And the workers showed their determination. We side with workers, and help them to get their rights.

— ★ —

## KNK Co-Chair Karamus: The Kurds want official status

ERDOGAN ZAMUR | ZURICH | 3 JULY 2023

The Treaty of Lausanne established the quadripartition of Kurdistan on 24 July 1923. Since then, Kurds have been subjected to genocide, assimilation and massacres under the sovereignty of the states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. The agreement laid the foundations for the disregard of the Kurdish people and the denial of their existence. The Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) takes the centenary of the signing of the treaty as an opportunity to show why Kurdish society does not accept the imposed circumstance of political and legal non-existence and demands its right to self-determination. In order to convey the Kurdish perspective against the status quo of nation states to the public, various organisations, political parties and groups from all parts of Kurdistan developed a Switzerland-wide action plan last year, which included a programme of conferences, panel discussions, protests, information evenings and cultural events around

the Treaty of Lausanne. An international conference on 22 and 23 July will be the preliminary highlight of the series. Ahmet Karamus, co-chair of the KNK, answered questions from ANF.

*The centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne is approaching. As KNK, you are organising an important conference to mark the occasion. What is the state of preparations?*

Our activities are not limited to this conference, it is basically a concluding congress. Since the launch of our action plan, various symposia, forums, exhibitions and different meetings have taken place. But we attach more importance to this conference, that is true. We call it the "Kurdistan Conference" and we expect that all Kurdish structures from the four national states will participate in it. Our plan is to include political parties, individuals, organisations as well as different faith communities and ethnic groups in the conference. We have been working intensively towards this for more than one and a half years now. Our engagement in this regard so far has led to important results. We see ourselves confirmed by the success in implementing our demands. Our main concern is the representation of all components of Kurdistan at our conference. We want to fulfil this requirement in any case. The KNK is in charge; various actors are involved in the preparation of the conference and in the implementation of its content. A broad-based committee consisting of various individuals, initiatives, groups and organisations recently met again to provide insights into the final preparations. These are in full swing and concern not only the conference, but also a declaration to be delivered on 24 July in front of the Palais de Rumine, the place where Kurdistan was divided into four parts a century ago.

*With whom did you hold the meetings you spoke of and which forces are involved in the action plan?*

A joint committee was formed, the '100 Years Treaty of Lausanne' Action Committee. The essential core of action around which the Kurdish forces have gathered to take a stand against the Treaty of Lausanne from their perspective is made up of parties and organisations, the number of which has recently increased to 157. Part of the participation process, which equally included the preparation of our strategic plan, are not only political structures, but also historians, artists, intellectuals and people from various other backgrounds. We also ensured the inclusion of the diaspora. For this purpose, relationships have been established worldwide with associations that act with the claim of political representation of the Kurds. We are aware of the great responsibility we have taken upon ourselves in preparing this conference. Our ideal is to hold a national conference.

*For what reason?*

Our objective is an inner-Kurdish perspective, a common stance and an overarching opposition to the Treaty of Lausanne. This endeavour requires a common project of all Kurds, including those in the diaspora. We have held discussions with a total of 175 organisations in all parts of Kurdistan and in exile, regardless of their ideology and party affiliation. Discussions were held and ideas were collected. We have also interacted with dignitaries and representatives of the faith and religious communities, tribal leaders, academics, employers, activists, artists and journalists. In summary, we have made an effort to bring all the colours of Kurdistan to our conference. So far, around 500 organisations and individuals have confirmed their participation. Our hope is that all Kurdish parties will be represented.

*Which parties or organisations refuse to cooperate with the committee and why?*

We want to dispel the idea that the Kurds cannot form a unity. If we are not united, if we do not succeed in coming together on a national level, there is a lot at stake for us in the world of the 21st century. Although the conference is being held under the banner of the KNK, the real organisers are the many actors of Kurdistan. The host of this conference is the entire Kurdish people. Our enemies are sparing no expense and effort to prevent us from overcoming our intra-Kurdish differences, developing a common stance and uniting into one voice. They are also approaching this project with the intention of sabotaging it, whereas we are striving to thwart such efforts.

We will not be guided by the interests of a small group or a political party. This is a national issue for our people. We see the conference as an area of national responsibility and are determined to formulate a national opposition to the Treaty of Lausanne on its 100th anniversary. We are working with this conviction.

We want to eliminate the tragedy of the Kurdish people that has been going on for a century. For this purpose, we will make efforts until the last moment to include all Kurdish forces in this conference. We want the Kurdish identity and the status of our people to be recognised. Therefore, we refuse to name parties that refuse to participate. We are not satisfied with this state of affairs, but continue to make efforts to win them over. I take this opportunity to appeal to all the stakeholders whom we as a committee have not or not yet reached out to, that they are invited to the conference and should in any case attend. This project is open to all who want to join together and raise objections and their voice against Lausanne.

*What is the aim of this conference?*

We will not only talk and analyse. Let's look back: With the Treaty of Qasr-e Shirin, Kurdistan was initially divided in two in 1639. In 1916, the governments of Great Britain and France then concluded the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, which created the basis for the Treaty of Lausanne, which recognised today's Turkey as the largest occupying power in Kurdistan under international law. The treaty divided the Kurdish settlement areas among four states, with some of the administration being taken over by others. The British secured the territories in what is now the state of Iraq, while the French took Syria under their wing. The Treaty of Lausanne was thus the starting signal for numerous tragedies and created the causes for endless conflicts that plague Kurdistan and its people to this day: massacres, genocide, forced resettlement and expulsions, changes in demography. The agreement is a black chapter in history. Responsible for this and for 100 years of destruction in Kurdistan are the victorious powers of the First World War. They are the ones who denied the identity, the culture, the history and the existence of the Kurdish people. We want to explain all these events to civil society and make the common demands of the Kurdish nation visible.

*What is in store for the Kurds in view of the anniversary of this treaty? How will they act?*

Kurdish deputies were also involved in the negotiations in Lausanne. This was to give the impression that they represented the Kurdish people. In fact, they were servants of the Turkish state. The Kurds were not included in the treaty, their rights, status and identity are still denied today. The Kurdish people have never accepted this imposed statuslessness. They revolted against this agreement, rebelled and fought. Even today, they claim an identity as a nation and want to gain status. The Kurdish people reject their oppression by the Treaty of Lausanne.



With this conference, the Kurds will demonstrate their stance against all the massacres and genocides that have been committed in Kurdistan for 100 years. We Kurds want official status in the four parts of Kurdistan with our existence, identity and language. The Kurds have an important opportunity in the politics of the Middle East and this is recognised by the peoples of the world. We must not miss this historic opportunity.

It is important to build an inner-Kurdish national unity. We must develop a national strategy to defend the rights of the Kurdish people. We can stand up to the United Nations, the European Union and the Arab League by proposing political ways and methods. This conference is very important for all Kurdish structures to develop a common discourse as one voice.

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## Opinion

### Closure of Lavrio camp: A NATO ‘gift’ to Erdoğan

ANF | LAVRIO | 7 JULY 2023

The Lavrio camp has a long history. Countless Kurdish and Turkish revolutionaries began their journey into exile there over the past 43 years. Now the camp, established in 1947, has been cleared by the Greek police.

On 5 July 2023, hundreds of Greek police stormed the self-managed camp and solidarity centre. The police broke down the doors and windows of the predominantly Kurdish refugee camp and used force to evacuate more than 50 Kurdish refugees, including children, and redistribute them to other camps.

#### Deportation to “refugee hell”

The majority of the detained camp residents were taken to the Inofiton (Oinofyta) camp, about 60 kilometres outside Athens. The camp in the factory building is one of the most notorious shelters for refugees in Greece. The camp was closed once in 2017 due to inhumane conditions. It was reopened in March 2018, not because conditions had improved, but to meet demand. Investigative journalists visited the camp after it reopened and found that conditions were even worse than when it was originally closed. The facility is described as a refugee “hell”.

In 2021, the camp was again in the headlines due to protests by refugees from Rojava. Residents blocked the entrance to the camp to protest against the conditions in Oinofyta and the continuous rejection of asylum applications of Kurds from Rojava and other regions. They were rejected because Turkey was sup-

posedly a safe third country. The refugees stated at the time: “We have no other solution [...] For three months we have not received any cash support, the situation is very difficult. But the most important problem is that in the last two to three months the asylum applications of about 150 Kurdish nationals from Syria, including families, women and children, have been rejected. We explained our situation in Turkey in the asylum hearing. It is not safe there at all.” They also criticised the regular internment in the camp. According to the authorities, only Kurdish refugees are now assigned to the supposedly renovated facility. However, the location of the camp alone shows the situation of the people. It is located on the edge of a motorway, far from any public transport. In this way, the Kurdish refugees are also meant to be isolated from Greek society, which repeatedly shows solidarity.

### **“Not a humanitarian action, but a military operation”**

One of the affected residents who were taken from Lavrio to Oinofyta is Leyla. She stressed that the authorities’ claims that it was a “humanitarian eviction” are not true. Rather, she said, it was a “military operation”. Leyla, who came to Greece with her husband and three children about a year ago because of persecution by the Turkish state, said of the Lavrio camp: “I never felt like a refugee there. I was not left alone culturally or socially. It was a Kurdish camp. We accepted it as our home.”

### **Hundreds of police for 30 to 40 people**

Leyla reported that the police entered the camp around five in the morning. At first, she thought the whole operation was a joke, she said, adding: “200 to 300 police officers surrounded the camp. Ten heavily armed police officers entered the building. They pointed guns at us. I have two daughters and a son. My daughters are four and five years old. How will they overcome this trauma? My children were very scared. I tried to make my daughter believe that the guns were ‘toys’, but the child knows this from Turkey. My children saw things they did not deserve to see. We saw our comrades, our girlfriends, they were handcuffed behind their backs. Hundreds of police were deployed for 30 to 40 people.”

### **“They will not achieve their goal”**

Leyla called the operation a “conspiracy” and continued: “They did not even allow us to change our clothes. I asked a male police officer to go out so I could change. But they didn't even allow that. I had to change behind a curtain while they were inside. This is how we were treated in Turkey, where we fled.” Leyla defined the operation as an attempt to disperse and isolate the refugees from Kurdistan, saying: “They think that they will finish off us, our companionship, in this way, but it is not possible.”

### **Result of a deal with Turkey**

Welat, also from Lavrio, stated that all Greek authorities, from ministry to municipality level, from intelligence, to riot, anti-terror, special operations and civil police units, were involved in the operation. He added that the town was under siege hours before the operation and police entered the camp at five in the morning. He stated that the police first used a dog to lure out the guard of the self-managed camp. Then the police attacked the guard. Welat also rejected the Greek authorities’ claim that the camp was cleared “at the request of the refugees”.

Referring to the talks between Turkey and Greece, Welat said that the Greek government acted in accordance with the demands of the Turkish state and that this operation was carried out on the basis of a deal between the two countries. He pointed out that Turkey was using Kurdish refugees as a means of blackmail.

### **Protest in front of the Parliament**

The Kurdish Democratic Cultural Centre (DKTM) in Greece also rejected the claim of the Greek Ministry of Asylum and Migration that the residents had voluntarily evacuated the refugee camp in Lavrio, stating that the camp was forcibly evacuated by riot police. The DKTM organised a demonstration in front of the Parliament in Athens to protest against the police action. The protesters pointed to the upcoming NATO summit and described the attack on Lavrio as part of a NATO deal with Turkey. Another demonstration was held in the Oinofyta camp in the evening by the relocated refugees.

### **Lavrio wanted cleared since 2017**

The Initiative for Solidarity with Kurdish Political Refugees in Lavrio pointed out that the Greek state has been trying to clear the camp since 2017. Thus, all aid by the Red Cross was withdrawn from the camp and state support was stopped. Despite this embargo on the refugees in the camp, the residents resisted for six years through self-organisation and self-sufficiency. Noting that the new right-wing government is trying to move towards Erdoğan, the initiative stated, “The closure of the camp is coming from Turkey. It has been calling the camp a ‘nest of PKK terrorists’ for years. The mayor of Lavrio has also been doing his best to expel Kurdish refugees for years.”

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