

Our Search for Justice Will Continue
Until the Turkish State Has Been Convicted for Its Feminicides

Statement of International Initiative *Justice for Nagihan Akarsel*

Our Initiative ‘Justice for Nagihan Akarsel’ began a year ago. The year before, on 4 October 2022, the Kurdish journalist, academic and women's rights activist Nagihan Akarsel was murdered as she left her home in the city centre of Sulaymaniyah in South Kurdistan / Iraq. Last year, more than 150 women's organisations and women from all continents and different professions appealed in an open letter to the UN, the Council of Europe and the Iraqi government to clarify the background of this political murder and to hold those responsible accountable, as well as to take legal and political measures to prevent further feminicides and political murders.

On 24 December 2023 the murderer Ismail Rasim Rifat Peker, a Turkish citizen, was sentenced to death by the Court of Cassation of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq under Article 2.2 of the Anti-Terrorism Law. But neither the public nor Nagihan Akarsel's relatives were informed about the legal investigations or court. In this way, the relatives were deprived of the right to participate in the proceedings through legal representation. According to the court decision and media reports, Ismail Peker had previously been arrested in Turkey for attacking a woman with a cleaver in December 2017. Although Peker was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment, he was already released in 2022 after 4 years and two month of detention. In his statements to the authorities in South Kurdistan after the murder of Nagihan Akarsel, İsmail Peker admitted that during his imprisonment in Turkey he had been instructed and paid by a “Turkish state official” to travel to Sulaymaniyah to kill Nagihan Akarsel. He admitted that during his stay in Sulaymaniyah he was guided and in constant contact with officials of the Turkish secret service MIT in the planning and execution of this murder. They also provided for him the weapon to carry out the crime. The fact that Peker was employed by the Turkish secret service MIT was already confirmed by a press statement by the Turkish ambassador to Iraq, Ali Rıza Güney, just a few days after the crime.¹

Despite there are numerous testimonies and evidence that Turkish state authorities organised the assassination of Nagihan Akarsel and that more people were involved in the crime, only Ismail Peker was convicted. To our knowledge, no legal action has yet been taken against the contractors of the murder or other accomplices, let alone political measures enacted to prevent further political feminicides.

A representative of the Directorate Middle East and North Africa of the European Union external action in Iraq replied to our open letter last year, stating that “EU Office in Erbil continues to follow the different issues related to this murder and the investigation.” However, it appears that no measures have been taken to protect the lives and freedom of expression of Kurdish women's rights defenders. On the contrary, the attitude of the Kurdistan Region and Iraqi authorities, the lack of sanctions by international human rights mechanisms and the political inaction of international organisations have been encouraging the Turkish AKP-MHP government to further intensify the assassination of Kurdish politicians, especially Kurdish women leaders and journalists, inside and outside Turkey.

These include the assassinations of *Sakine Cansız*, *Fidan Doğan* and *Leyla Saylemez* on 9 January 2013 in Paris, of *Zeyneb Sarokhan* on 22 September 2022 by a drone attack of the Turkish army in Region of Autonomous Administration North and East Syria (AANES), of *Emine Kara* on 23

¹<https://medyanews.net/identity-of-nagihan-akarsels-assassin-revealed/>

December 2022 in Paris, of *Leman Shiwesh* and *Yusra Derwish* on 20 June 2023 by a Turkish army drone attack in the AANES Region, of *Feryal Sileman Khalid* on 18 January 2024 in Kerkuk / South Kurdistan-Iraq. Again, on 23 August 2024 a Turkish army drone targeted the car and assassinated the Kurdish journalists *Gulistan Tara* and *Hero Bahadin* in the region of Suleymaniya / South Kurdistan-Iraq. However, following Saddam Hussein's 'Anfal' genocide operations, the Turkish army is now bombing and evacuating Kurdish and Assyrian villages, burning forests and massacring civilians - men, women and children - in the same areas of Southern Kurdistan. From 2023 to July 2024, a total of 30 civilians, including 4 children, were massacred by the Turkish army in Southern Kurdistan.²

We call on the bodies of the Council of Europe and the UN to take immediate and effective measures to prevent their member state Turkey from continuing to break international law with impunity and to ensure that those actually responsible for these political murders are politically and legally sanctioned.

In order to achieve justice for Nagihan Akarsel and all others murdered by the Turkish state as well as to prevent further feminicides targeting women's rights defenders and journalists, we call on journalists, academics, artists, local and international human rights and women's organisations to address the political dimension of these murders through press statements, articles and a variety of actions and to work together to convict those primarily responsible for the murders.

In this sense we are renewing our demands for insuring urgent measures to defend the lives and rights of Kurdish women right defenders and journalists:

- The prosecution and conviction of the perpetrators responsible for and involved in the assassination of Nagihan Akarsel and all other extra-judicial killings.
- Closure of Iraqi and Syrian airspace for the Turkish Air Force, including armed and unarmed UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles).
- Urging Turkey to stop its illegal attacks, politics of occupation, war, and systematic assassinations of women rights defenders and people living in any part of Kurdistan, especially with regards to the territories of Iraq and North and East Syria.
- Prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity – including genocide and femicide - committed by Erdogan and the AKP-MHP government, in accordance with international law.

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²Human Rights Organisation CPT - Community Peacemaker Teams, annual reports: <https://cptik.org/reports>