

# TURKEY RIGHTS MONITOR



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**January 13:** Human Rights Watch released its [World Report 2021](#). The Turkey section of the report covered a broad range of problems including the executive interference in the judiciary, the mass incarceration of dissidents on bogus and overbroad terrorism and other charges and the crackdown on the Kurdish political movement.

## ARBITRARY DETENTION AND ARREST

**January 13:** Reports revealed that the vice-chair of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) and three special rapporteurs sent a [letter](#) to the Turkish government in November 2020 in which they said that the vague and imprecise charge of “membership in an armed terrorist organization” appeared to be repeatedly misused to target critics of the Turkish government.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

**January 11:** The police in Ankara [blocked](#) a sit-in protest held by workers who were fired from Cargill over their union membership, briefly detaining 10 people.

**January 12:** The police in İstanbul briefly [detained](#) three people as part of an investigation into protests about the appointment of a pro-government rector to the Boğaziçi University.

**January 12:** The Şanlıurfa Governor’s Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 15 days.

**January 14:** A Diyarbakır court [sentenced](#) Mehmet Emin Aktar, former head of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, to six years, three months on terrorism-related charges, over his attendance in demonstrations organized by the Democratic Society Congress (DTK).

**January 14:** The police in Ankara [blocked](#) a demonstration in protest of the appointment of a pro-government rector to the Boğaziçi University, briefly detaining five protesters.

**January 14:** The Batman Governor’s Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 15 days.

**January 15:** A Bitlis court [sentenced](#) 24 people, including local politicians, to one year, three months in prison each for attending an unauthorized demonstration in January 2016.

**January 15:** The Hakkari Governor’s Office [issued](#) a ban on all outdoor gatherings for a period of 15 days.

**January 16:** An annual human rights [report](#) published by opposition MP Sezgin Tanrikulu found that the police intervened in 753 demonstrations, public press statements and assemblies in 2020, detaining at least 2,123 people, including two children, and arresting 44 among those who attended the events. A total of 294 people were convicted in cases related to those activities.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

**January 11:** A quarterly media monitoring [report](#) said that during the last quarter of 2020, a total of 485 news stories were censored and eight journalists were detained.

**January 11:** An İstanbul court [ruled](#) to block access to a news story and a YouTube video featuring the remarks of opposition MP Mustafa Yeneroğlu about a high judiciary member.

**January 12:** The [Press Advertising Agency](#) (BİK), the government body responsible for regulating publicly

funded ads, cut the public ads of the BirGün newspaper for three days over a report about broadcasting watchdog RTÜK.

**January 13:** An İstanbul court [filed](#) a lawsuit against journalist Melis Alphan for posting a photo from Newroz celebrations in Turkey's Kurdish-majority Southeast in 2015. Alphan now faces up to seven years, six months in prison on terrorism-related charges.

**January 13:** The police in Urfa [detained](#) nine people in house raids, on the charge of "spreading terrorist propaganda on social media."

**January 13:** An İstanbul court [blocked](#) access to news reports covering a previous gag order to nearly 300 reports on files detailing alleged incidences of illegal spending and irregularities in the İstanbul Municipality during the time it was held by the ruling AKP.

**January 13:** Broadcasting regulator RTÜK [imposed](#) an administrative fine on the government-critical Halk TV over the remarks of a former minister on the station who questioned headscarf freedom for civil servants.

**January 13:** Broadcasting regulator RTÜK [imposed](#) an administrative fine on the government-critical TELE 1 over the remarks of a news anchor critical of the state religious body Diyanet.

**January 13:** Turkey [leads](#) the world in Twitter censorship to according to [transparency report data](#) for the years 2012 to 2020, submitting the largest number of takedown requests and court orders. Court orders and other legal demands combined, Turkey sent 45,776 requests to Twitter.

**January 14:** The police [detained](#) journalist Pınar Gayıp, upon a detention warrant issued by İzmir prosecutors.

**January 14:** Three people in İstanbul [assaulted](#) journalist and lawyer Afşin Hatipoğlu.

**January 14:** A Bayburt court [filed](#) a lawsuit against journalist Ferhat Çelik over a news report about the problems with food hygiene in a local prison.

**January 14:** The police in İstanbul [raided](#) the bureau of the Etkin news agency (ETHA), seizing computers, cameras, digital equipment as well as cash.

**January 14:** President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [said](#) social media companies have begun to "toe the line"

since they were fined for failing to comply with a new law tightening control over social media.

**January 15:** İstanbul prosecutors launched an investigation into TV actress [Öykü Serter](#) for allegedly "provoking hatred and enmity among public," over her social media commentary about the İzmir earthquake.

**January 15:** Three people in Ankara [attacked](#) journalist Orhan Uğuroğlu.

**January 15:** An Ankara court [ruled](#) to block access to the website of the Marksist Teori magazine.

**January 16:** An annual human rights [report](#) published by opposition MP Sezgin Tanrikulu found that 719 people were detained, 32 were arrested and 30 were convicted in 2020 for expressing views critical of the president and the government. The report also said 21 members of the press were attacked and 27 were arrested last year, while investigations were launched into 53 journalists. It also said that there were at least 87 journalists in Turkey's prisons as of Dec. 4.

**January 16:** Opposition MP Utku Çakırözer [revealed](#) that five members of the press were assaulted on the street in the first 15 days of 2021.

## JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE & RULE OF LAW

**January 13:** Reports revealed that the vice-chair of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) and three special rapporteurs sent a [letter](#) to the Turkish government in November 2020 in which they said that the vague and imprecise charge of "membership in an armed terrorist organization" appeared to be repeatedly misused to target critics of the Turkish government.

## KURDISH MINORITY

**January 13:** A court in Şırnak ruled to arrest local HDP politician [Resul Sadak](#) on terrorism-related charges.

**January 13:** Ankara prosecutors started drafting [summaries of proceedings](#) for nine HDP lawmakers, including HDP Co-chair Pervin Buldan, accusing them of "instigating" street protests in Turkey's Southeast in 2014 that claimed the lives of 37 people.

**January 13:** An İstanbul court [filed](#) a lawsuit against journalist Melis Alphan for posting a photo from Newroz celebrations in Turkey's Kurdish-majority Southeast in

2015. Alphan now faces up to seven years, six months in prison on terrorism-related charges.

**January 14:** The police in 12 provinces [detained](#) 48 people, including HDP politician Sıtkı Güngör and journalist Pınar Gayıp, upon detention warrants issued by İzmir prosecutors.

**January 14:** A Diyarbakır court [sentenced](#) Mehmet Emin Aktar, former head of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, to six years, three months on terrorism-related charges, over his attendance in demonstrations organized by the Democratic Society Congress (DTK).

**January 14:** The police in Şırnak reportedly [forced](#) an underage in custody to read out the Turkish national anthem for a day.

**January 15:** A Bitlis court [sentenced](#) 24 people, including local politicians, to one year, three months in prison each for attending an unauthorized demonstration in January 2016.

**January 16:** An annual human rights [report](#) published by opposition MP Sezgin Tanrikulu found that 226 political party and municipality chairs and members, the majority of them from the pro-Kurdish HDP, were arrested, while 52 elected officials were removed from their posts and replaced with government-appointed trustees in 2020. The report also underlined that an Ankara court on Dec. 26 rejected a call by the European Court of Human Rights for the immediate release of Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtaş, who has been behind bars on politically motivated charges since November 2016.

## MISTREATMENT OF CITIZENS ABROAD

**January 12:** The European Court of Human Rights sent an official request to Albania not to deport Turkish citizen [Selami Şimşek](#) to Turkey before his trial is finalized. Şimşek reportedly applied for asylum in Albania out of fear of persecution in Turkey on account of his links to the Gülen movement.

**January 13:** Austria deported [Feyyaz Ö.](#), a man who was previously arrested on charges of plotting to assassinate Austrian politician Berivan Aslan on behalf of Turkish intelligence, to Italy, where he holds a citizenship.

## PRISON CONDITIONS

**January 13:** The [Human Rights Association](#) (İHD) drafted a report about prison conditions in Central Anatolian provinces in the last quarter of 2020, noting widespread problems such as overcrowding, lack of hygiene and of adequate measures against Covid-19.

**January 13:** A law firm [announced](#) that Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and other prisoners held at the İmralı High-Security Type-F Prison have not been able to communicate with the outside world since April 2020.

**January 14:** Several Turkey-based rights groups held a joint press [conference](#), highlighting an ongoing hunger strike of prisoners in 107 prisons of Turkey over violations of rights in prisons.

**January 16:** Reports revealed that sick inmate [Resul Kocatürk](#) was denied medical treatment by a Kırıkkale prison for eight months.

## REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

**January 17:** A group of at least 20 people [attacked](#) Syrian refugees in İzmir, leaving three wounded, one of whom in critical condition.

## TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

**January 12:** The guards in a Gümüşhane prison physically [assaulted](#) three prisoners.

**January 12:** The gendarmerie forces in Diyarbakır physically [assaulted](#) two people while detaining them during a house raid.

**January 13:** The guards in a Tekirdağ prison physically [assaulted](#) prisoner Ahmet Sürme after he refused a strip-search. Sürme's request to be taken to a hospital to document his injuries was also rejected.

**January 14:** The guards in a Kahramanmaraş prison physically [assaulted](#) four prisoners, causing serious injuries in their arms and legs.

**January 14:** The police in Şırnak reportedly [forced](#) an underage in custody to read out the Turkish national anthem for a day.

**January 16:** An annual human rights [report](#) published by opposition MP Sezgin Tanrikulu found 3,534 incidents of torture or maltreatment in 2020, with 1,855 of them taking place in prisons.

**January 17:** Prison guards in a Bolu prison [physically assaulted](#) inmates Deniz Şah, Mehmet Dersulu and İlhan Kaya. Despite their requests, the prisoners were reportedly not taken to a medical examination to document their injuries.

## **WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

**January 16:** An annual human rights [report](#) published by opposition MP Sezgin Tanrikulu found that at least 300 women were killed by men in 2020, most of them victims of domestic violence.