

15 June 2020

Joint statement on Kurdish journalist Nedim Türfent's imprisonment

Today, the International Press Institute (IPI), PEN International, Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) and 42 undersigned organisations mark the 1,500th day of Kurdish journalist Nedim Türfent's imprisonment with a renewed call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Türfent, who was predominantly reporting on the Kurdish issues, was [detained](#) on May 12, 2016, shortly after reporting on Turkish special police forces' ill-treatment of around 40 Turkish and Kurdish workers. They were handcuffed behind their backs before being forced to lie on the ground in the south-eastern city of Hakkari in Spring 2016. In video footage taken by Türfent and published by the now-shuttered pro-Kurdish Dicle News Agency, a police officer was seen shouting to the workers: "You will see the power of Turks! What did this state do to you?" apparently alleging that the workers have links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Right after the release of the footage, Türfent began receiving death threats from the police in the form of funeral photos. An online harassment campaign was launched against him in April 2016 including death threats and insults and anonymous or bot accounts asking about his whereabouts.

One day after his arrest on May 13, 2016, Türfent was charged with "membership of a terrorist organization". The indictment was first produced 13 months after his arrest, at the first hearing on June 14, 2017. By that time, Türfent had already been jailed for 399 days.

Of the 20 witnesses called in the ensuing trial, 19 said that their initial statements against Türfent had been obtained under torture. Yet the court sentenced him to eight years and nine months in prison in December 2017. The judicial proceedings were quick by Turkish standards and amounted to a show trial intended to punish Türfent immediately for his truth-telling journalism. Türfent was denied the right to attend his own trial in person, one of many fair trial violations. On May 21, 2019, Turkey's Supreme Court of Cassation [upheld](#) his sentence. His case is now pending before the European Court of Human Rights.

June 21 marks 1,500 days that Türfent has spent behind bars, deprived of his freedom and the right to practice his profession – journalism. Imprisoning journalists has long since become the preferred shortcut of Turkey's authorities to punish news they find "disturbing". Show trials of journalists under "anti-terror law" and continued repression of especially pro-Kurdish media outlets created an immense pressure and chilling effect on the journalists who report from the Kurdish-populated areas in Turkey.

We call on Turkish authorities once again to stop this injustice!

Salil Tripathi, Chair of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee, said: "Nedim Türfent should never have been detained in the first place, yet today we mark his 1500th day behind bars in this gross miscarriage of justice. Evidently, he is imprisoned for simply doing his job as a journalist, and he must be released, unconditionally and without delay."

IPI Deputy Director Scott Griffen said: "For the 'crime' of doing journalism, Nedim Türfent has now spent 1,500 days in prison. He has been harassed, targeted, threatened and deprived of his freedom. Turkey must end this injustice and release Nedim immediately as well as all other journalists in Turkey jailed for doing their jobs."

MLSA co-director and Türfent's lawyer Veysel Ok said: "Nedim Türfent was detained, subjected to torture and prosecuted as a result of his reporting on the repression of the Kurdish community. Tens of witnesses were forced to testify against him. These witnesses stated that their initial testimonies were given under torture. Despite the subsequent withdrawal of their statements, the court sentenced Nedim to eight years and nine months in prison based on the initial witness statements. Nedim has been imprisoned for 1500 days for his journalism for which he should have been rewarded. We call on the ECtHR to give priority status to his application to review his case and rule on the violation of his rights. We also call on the government of Turkey to put an immediate end to this injustice. Nedim's story is the Kurdish journalists' story in Turkey. Therefore, we expect a long chain of solidarity to be established for Kurdish journalists in Turkey."

The undersigned organizations call for [an action to sign on to this statement](#). Show solidarity with Nedim by sending him your support messages so he knows that he is not alone in this injustice.

MLSA has also published the poetry book of Nedim which is now available for [free online](#) (only in Turkish).

Sign the statement, spread his work and show support!

Signed by:

International Press Institute (IPI)
Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA)
PEN International
Articolo 21
French PEN
German PEN
English PEN
Article 19
European Centre for Press and Media
Freedom (ECPMF)
Freedom House
Index on Censorship
PEN Turkey
Swedish PEN
South East Europe Media Organisation
(SEEMO)
P24 (Platform for Independent Journalism)
Wales PEN Cymru
Danish PEN
Georgia PEN
Lithuanian PEN
PEN Ukraine
Scottish PEN
PEN Eritrea
PEN Netherlands
PEN America
Norwegian PEN

Uganda PEN
Icelandic PEN
Swedish PEN
San Miguel de Allende PEN
Moscow PEN
Independent Chinese PEN Centre
PEN Québec
New Zealand Society of Authors Te Puni
Kaituhi o Aotearoa (PEN NZ) Inc
PEN Nicaragua
St Petersburg PEN
Swiss-German PEN
Kurdish PEN
PEN Suisse Romand
PEN Center for German Language Writers
Abroad
Romanian PEN
PEN Belgium/Flanders
Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of
Turkey - Turkish Press, Broadcasting and
Printer Workers' Union
Press in Arrest
Human Rights Foundation of Turkey
Life Memory Freedom Association