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World Association of Newspapers
and News Publishers

WAN-IFRA defends and promotes
press freedom and helps
independent news publishing
companies to succeed in their
transformation process, increase
their business, and perform their
crucial role in open societies.

A worldwide knowledge organisation
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over 3,000 companies in more than
120 countries, WAN-IFRA provides
the industry with strategic insights,
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3 May 2017

Ambassador Hakkı Musa,

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) is writing to you on World Press Freedom Day as a member of IFEX, the global network of 108 organisations dedicated to promoting and defending freedom of expression, to call for a full return of individual and press freedom of expression in Turkey.

Since the failed coup attempt last year, Turkey has become the world's greatest jailer of journalists, with nearly 150 journalists arrested, the majority of them still in detention. The months since the coup have seen the closure of over 180 media outlets, dismissal of many thousands of individuals from their professional positions for their beliefs or associations, and repeated connection by state officials during the constitutional referendum of 'No' voters and terrorists – all of which have dealt serious blows to the space for open dialogue in Turkey. Every state has the right to protect its citizens from harm, but these actions have gone far beyond the requirements of public safety, and are corroding the vibrant political culture that distinguishes a democracy from a dictatorship.

More than simple overreach, the powers granted by the state of emergency seem to have become an umbrella tool to silence dissent. The extension of the crackdown to Kurdish, Alevi and left-wing media uninformed in the coup suggests that the recently renewed decree is being abused beyond its stated purpose. Instead, it is being used to harass individuals and groups that are merely inconvenient to the government in power, and that are not threats to the democratic system. Many people have been detained and punished because they disagree with the elected government's actions or policy, or are part of or sympathetic to a minority group. In taking this approach, Turkey is violating both internationally recognised human rights and universally understood principles of justice - assigning guilt by association, not by evidence, and punishing individuals for their thoughts and beliefs, not their actions.

We believe this abuse of the state of emergency decree must end. We are calling on your government to dismiss all on-going prosecutions in Turkish courts that do not stand up to scrutiny by international standards for freedom of expression, and set new limits on the powers granted by the state of emergency to respect Turkey's obligations under international and European human rights conventions.

We hope that a renewed commitment to free expression can start with an end to the prosecution of our IFEX colleagues at the Initiative for Freedom of Expression – Turkey and Bianet, including Şanar Yurdatapan and Erol Önderoğlu, and all those who stood with them during the Özgür Gündem guest editor solidarity campaign last year. We are also calling for reversal of the recent conviction of teacher Ayşe Çelik, punished for her statement decrying silence about on-going killings in Diyarbakir, and with whom many became symbolic 'co-signers' of her statement, including Şanar.

Ambassador, acts like those of Ayşe and our colleagues are not acts of terrorism – they are acts of free expression. As extremist politics and intolerance gain momentum all around the world, the role of a healthy civil society and active free press have never been more important. It is through their role in fostering contentious but peaceful debate about such issues that democracy survives and thrives.

In recognition of both the Turkish government's treaty obligations and the vital contribution of press and civil society groups to Turkey, we call on your government to:

1. Return police detention without legal review to the normal maximum four day period, and amend other provisions of the emergency decree to be compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
2. Explicitly limit terrorism charges to individuals for whom clear evidence exists of acts of violence, intent to commit acts of violence, or advocating for acts of violence, and drop terrorism charges against those who have not committed any such act;
3. Refer cases of media outlets affected by the recent shutdowns back to the judiciary, and permit them to re-open unless and until they are found guilty of a serious crime;
4. Set clear limits on the use of travel bans and passport confiscation, and end the extension of these measures to family members;
5. Renew respect for press credentials by state agents, and return confiscated credentials to press not found guilty of a crime.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Tomas Brunegård
President
World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers



Marcelo Rech
President
World Editors Forum

WAN-IFRA is the global organisation for the world's newspapers and news publishers, with formal representative status at the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The organisation groups 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries.