

TURKEY: UPR OUTCOMES
ITEM 6
ARTICLE 19 – Delivered by Andrew Smith
26 JUNE 2015

Mr. President,

ARTICLE 19 and Punto24 welcome Turkey's engagement with the UPR process and thank States who made recommendations on freedom of expression.

We welcome Estonia's recommendation that Turkey decriminalise defamation. We note the continuing prosecutions of individuals for insulting public officials, with many cases emanating from the President's office.

We also welcome Spain's recommendation that Turkey amend the Internet Law to ensure "that the telecommunications authority cannot block websites without judicial authority" and Norway's recommendation that Turkey "refrain from censoring social and conventional media". Turkey's claim that the latter has already been implemented is highly questionable given the blanket blocking of social media in March.

Turkey's representative, Mr Bülent Arınc, told this Council during its last session that Turkey enjoys complete media pluralism, maintaining that imprisoned journalists are detained for crimes unrelated to their journalistic activities. In reality, politically motivated arrests, prosecutions, and harassment of journalists persist.

Prominent cases include: the sentencing of newspaper editor Bülent Keneş to a 21 month suspended sentence for a tweet allegedly insulting President Erdoğan; the arrest of journalist Mehmet Baransu in March on charges related to disclosure of state secrets; and the ongoing detention of TV chief Hidayet Karaca, arrested in December 2014 on terrorism charges, related to a fictional TV series broadcast five years previously.

The arrest of newspaper editor Can Dündar is of particular concern, given President Erdogan's personal involvement in the case, including directly threatening the editor. Dündar faces a maximum penalty of an aggravated life sentence and an additional 42 years imprisonment under series of charges relating to state security and terrorism, following his newspaper's publication of information about the transfer of arms to Syria by the Turkish government.

Harassment and prosecution of media workers not only affects the individuals concerned, it also has a devastating effect on freedom of expression more broadly, leading to self-censorship.

We call on Turkey to ensure that the rights to free expression and fair trial are fully protected in law and practise.