

[HRC45 | Turkey must protect human rights defenders](#)

25.09.2020

At the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council, during the adoption of the UPR of Turkey, ISHR delivered a statement highlighting the heightened threats and attacks against human rights defenders and called on the Turkish government to ensure that defenders can carry out their legitimate activities without fear of attack, reprisal and judicial harassment.



During the previous UPR cycle, Turkey received only one recommendation related to the protection of defenders, which was “noted” by the country, while in the current cycle, this number has increased to 17. This is because, in the last five years, the space for civil society in Turkey has dramatically narrowed, the environment for the work of human rights defenders has seriously deteriorated, and many crucial safeguards protecting defenders have been removed.

ISHR recalled that, during the emergency rule, attacks on the fundamental rights and freedoms persisted through an intensified crackdown against all forms of peaceful dissent and unprecedented policies aiming to restrict civic space in Turkey.

ISHR underlined the fact that despite two years having passed since the end of the emergency rule, the crackdown on civil society continues unabated. Defenders are still systematically stigmatized, judicially harassed, and arbitrarily detained, including Osman Kavala for example, a prominent civil rights activist who remains imprisoned exceeding a thousand days despite the decision of the ECHR and the recommendation of Committee of Ministers for his immediate release. In practice, blanket bans on assemblies, in particular on peaceful gatherings by women and LGBTI+ defenders, are still in place. Police violence against peaceful protesters and impunity of security forces has been “normalized”. Many human rights organisations continue to face reprisals, while some others have already been shut down by the emergency decrees.

ISHR also highlighted recently intensified attacks and threats against defenders under the guise of COVID-19-related preventive measures. Health rights defenders informing the public about the pandemic have been targeted and judicially harassed for allegedly “issuing threats to create fear and panic among the public”. Public vilification and stigmatization of women and LGBTI+ rights defenders in the pretext of COVID-19 is also on the rise.

ISHR echoed all recommendations related to the protection of defenders and called the Turkish government,

among others, to ensure that defenders can carry out their legitimate activities without fear of attack, reprisal and judicial harassment, and to adopt comprehensive legislation for the protection of defenders that includes the investigation of allegations of violations, acts of intimidation and reprisals.

Read the UPR joint submission by ISHR and partners [here](#).

Watch the statement here:

Contact: Salma El Hosseiny: s.hosseiny@ishr.ch

Photo: Wikimedia/Osman Kavala at the Armenian Genocide centennial commemoration near Taksim Square, Istanbul (Photo: Rupen Janbazian, 2015)

ISHR