

TURKEY RIGHTS MONITOR



Issue No. 247 | Date 10-16 March

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND ARREST

Throughout the week, prosecutors ordered the detention of at least 19 people over alleged links to the Gülen movement. In October 2020, a UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) [opinion](#) said that widespread or systematic imprisonment of individuals with alleged links to the group may amount to crimes against humanity. Solidarity with OTHERS has compiled a detailed [database](#) to monitor the Gülen-linked mass detentions since a failed coup in July 2016.

13 March: In İzmir, police [detained](#) eight people in house raids over alleged links to the Gülen movement, citing participation in legal protests against closed institutions, having accounts at Bank Asya, and past employment at post-2016 closed educational organizations, despite ECtHR [Yalcinkaya decision](#).

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

11 March: Former teacher Gazi Bahargülü, dismissed in 2016 over alleged links to the Gülen movement, [died](#) by suicide in Osmaniye after ingesting rat poison, highlighting the ongoing struggles of individuals removed from public service under Turkey's post-coup purges.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

No news has emerged of [Yusuf Bilge Tunc](#), a former public sector worker who was sacked from his job by a decree-law during the 2016-2018 state of emergency and who was reported missing as of August 6, 2019, in what appears to be one of the latest cases in a string of suspected [enforced disappearance](#) of government critics since 2016.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

12 March: Police [detained](#) Ferdi Sarıkaya in front of Istanbul Çağlayan Courthouse during a press statement demanding the closure of Y and S-type prisons, which are high-security facilities criticized for harsh isolation conditions and severe restrictions on prisoners' rights.

14 March: An İstanbul court has [ruled](#) for the acquittal of 46 people from the Saturday Mothers, a group of activists and relatives seeking to learn the fate of loved ones who disappeared while in police custody in Turkey in the 1990s, who were tried for participating in a protest in August 2018.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

11 March: Turkish academic and journalist Çiğdem Bayraktar Ör has been [given](#) a suspended sentence of more than one year on conviction of “insulting the president” and ‘insulting a public official’.

11 March: Author Hasan Polat was [detained](#) at Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport due to an arrest warrant issued against him in connection with an investigation into the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP).

13 March: The Turkish Parliament has [passed](#) a controversial cybersecurity law despite strong warnings from opposition politicians, rights groups and legal experts that it could enable broad surveillance, restrict free speech and lead to potential abuses of power.

13 March: Eight independent online news outlets in Turkey have [issued](#) an open letter protesting Google's algorithm changes, which they say have drastically reduced their reader traffic and put their financial sustainability at risk.

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE & RULE OF LAW

11 March: A total of 13 summaries of proceedings requesting the lifting of immunity for 9 opposition members of parliament were [submitted](#) to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM).

12 March: Turkish prosecutors have [indicted](#) actors Halit Ergenç and Rıza Kocaoğlu on charges of false testimony in an investigation into celebrity manager Ayşe Barım's alleged involvement in the 2013 Gezi Park protests, seeking prison sentences of up to four years.

12 March: Twelve people, including former Sarıyer Mayor Şükrü Genç, were [arrested](#) in an investigation into allegations that four CHP-led municipalities provided financial support to the DHKP/C, a far-left militant organization designated as a terrorist group by Turkey, with authorities claiming that public contracts were used to channel funds to the group between 2014 and 2016.

13 March: The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers has again [called](#) on Turkey to immediately release Selahattin Demirtaş, citing ECtHR rulings and expressing concern over his continued detention since 2016 in an interim resolution adopted on March 6 and published on March 12.

KURDISH MINORITY

14 March: DEM Party Youth Council member Hüseyin Aslan was [detained](#) in Urfa's Bozova district over a social media post about the Siirt Governor, who was appointed as a trustee replacing the elected Siirt Mayor.

PRISON CONDITIONS

11 March: DEM Party lawmaker Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu [warned](#) that Turkish prisons, currently holding 400,000 inmates despite a capacity of 300,000, face severe overcrowding, with nearly 100,000 prisoners sleeping on the floor due to space shortages.

TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

12 March: Turkish prison authorities in Eskişehir have [delayed](#) the parole of critically ill inmate Yılmaz Çerçel, who suffers from Alzheimer's and schizophrenia, by three months, citing lack of remorse despite concerns over his fitness for incarceration.

13 March: DEM Party lawmaker Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu [urged](#) Turkey's Ministry of Family Affairs to intervene in the case of 72-year-old Alzheimer's patient İbrahim Güngör, imprisoned for alleged links to the Gülen movement, citing his deteriorating health and the Ministry of Justice's failure to ensure adequate medical care.