



## **SPEAK UP! Conference on Freedom of Expression And Media in the Western Balkans and Turkey**

### **International Press Institute (IPI) Contribution: Measures to Improve Press Freedom in Turkey**

Representatives of the International Press Institute (IPI) led an emergency Press Freedom Mission to Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey, from 16 -- 19 March, 2011.

The mission followed waves of arrests of journalists in Turkey in recent months under anti-terrorism laws and laws against armed criminal organizations, including the arrest of IPI World Press Freedom Hero Nedim Sener. According to a recent report by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Turkey is currently holding Sener and at least 56 other journalists in prison – apparently more than any other country.

IPI's mission focused on the imprisonment of journalists in connection with the alleged "Ergenekon" plot by secular ultra-nationalists, and on journalists incarcerated for alleged ties to Kurdish and Marxist organizations. Representatives met with IPI's Turkish National Committee, the Turkish Journalists' Association, members of the Freedom for Journalists Platform, representatives of The Media Association and other journalists and editors. They also met with the head of the Turkish Foreign Ministry's Human Rights Commission.

Based on these meetings, IPI believes that measures in the following areas are necessary to improve the situation with regard to freedom of expression and media in Turkey.

#### **Restrict Criminalisation of Speech**

The number of journalists imprisoned suggests they are being targeted for critical reporting. The right of journalists to cover sensitive topics, including national security, is fundamental. Those who do not engage in criminal activity should not face arrest, charges, imprisonment or any other form of harassment or intimidation for doing their job. Turkey needs to restrict criminalization of speech to clear instances of intentional incitement to terrorism or other forms of violence, and to allow journalists to subject government action to open and independent scrutiny.

#### **Ensure Due Process**

Many journalists, particularly those detained in connection with the Ergenekon probe, have not been informed of the charges they face, nor have their attorneys. Further, many are subject to pre-trial imprisonment of indeterminate length. The government should make public evidence supporting allegations of criminal activity by journalists, and allow the accused to confront such evidence in an open, fair hearing conducted in a timely manner. Journalists who are not transparently proven – to the satisfaction of international legal standards - to have engaged in criminal activity must be released.



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## Reduce Inflammatory Rhetoric

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has publicly affirmed Turkey's commitment to press freedom, while impugning the motives of those who exercise such freedom, accusing them of defamation. He recently compared an unpublished book focusing on allegations of religious influence within Turkey's police, which was ordered confiscated by a court, to a "bomb". Such statements, accompanied by raids on journalists' homes and businesses, create a climate of fear among journalists. Turkish authorities should use care in their statements about allegations against journalists to avoid inflammatory rhetoric that renders even more difficult an honest evaluation of the charges.

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