

Turkish regime imprisons and harasses artists, journalists and academics after coup attempt

By Sandy English
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Since the failed Turkish coup of July 15, carried out by sections of the military with the undoubted connivance of the United States, the right-wing Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has arrested or detained over 60,000 political opponents. These include coup supporters in the army, members of the judiciary and educators whom it has accused of supporting Erdoğan's American-based rival, Fethullah Gülen, widely believed to be a CIA asset.

It would appear that the regime is taking advantage of the unpopular coup attempt to settle accounts with opponents of various stripes. It has implemented dictatorial measures against freedom of expression, including artistic expression, after it declared a state of emergency on July 21 and closed at least 15 universities and 1,043 private schools which it claims have ties to Gülen.

The regime has also closed three news agencies, 39 television and radio stations, 60 newspapers and magazines and 29 publishing houses. According to the Turkish daily *Hürriyet*, books produced by these publishers will be removed from Turkish libraries and pulped.

Turkish authorities have issued arrest warrants for 89 journalists since the end of July. Most were accused of being members of armed terrorist organizations and attempting to overthrow the government.

The International Press Institute's Director of Advocacy and Communications, Steven M. Ellis, said in a statement, "The staggering number of journalists targeted in the ongoing purge, coupled with the near-complete lack of evidence implicating them in any criminal or terrorist activities and the fact that many of

them have been critics of government policies, suggests that the purge now has more to do with settling scores and silencing the president's opponents than with identifying and punishing those actually responsible for the coup attempt."

Aside from the closure of educational institutions, according to a July 31 open letter signed by 42 international scholarly organizations, the Erdoğan regime has fired nearly 15,000 employees at the education ministry and asked for the resignation of almost 1,600 deans. On July 24, the government detained at least 31 academics from Istanbul University on suspicions of supporting organizations around Fethullah Gülen. Travel abroad for academics has been restricted.

Even before the coup, the AKP government had threatened academics and attempted to tie dissent on the universities to terrorism. In January, police rounded up 27 academics who had signed a petition, along with over 1,400 others, that demanded that the Erdoğan government cease attacks on "life, liberty, and security," and urged "in particular the prohibition of torture" in Turkey's Kurdish-majority provinces.

Artists have also been targeted by the AKP regime in recent weeks. Zehra Doğan, an artist with an international reputation, who has been painting and reporting from the largely Kurdish city of Mardin in the southeast of the country, was arrested by security forces on July 21 while sitting in a café. Charges of supporting a terrorist organization were laid against her and her painting was used as evidence.

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