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Turkey arrests Kurdish journalists, politicians and prepares to invade Syria

Sixteen of the 20 Kurdish journalists detained in Diyarbakir on June 8 were arrested and sent to prison on Thursday, as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government escalates attacks on press freedom.

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns these attacks and demands the release of all journalists. Faced with ever-increasing inflation and poverty, as well as a growing opposition and strike movement within the working class, the Erdoğan government is trying to use militarism and chauvinism to suppress the class struggle and target basic democratic rights.

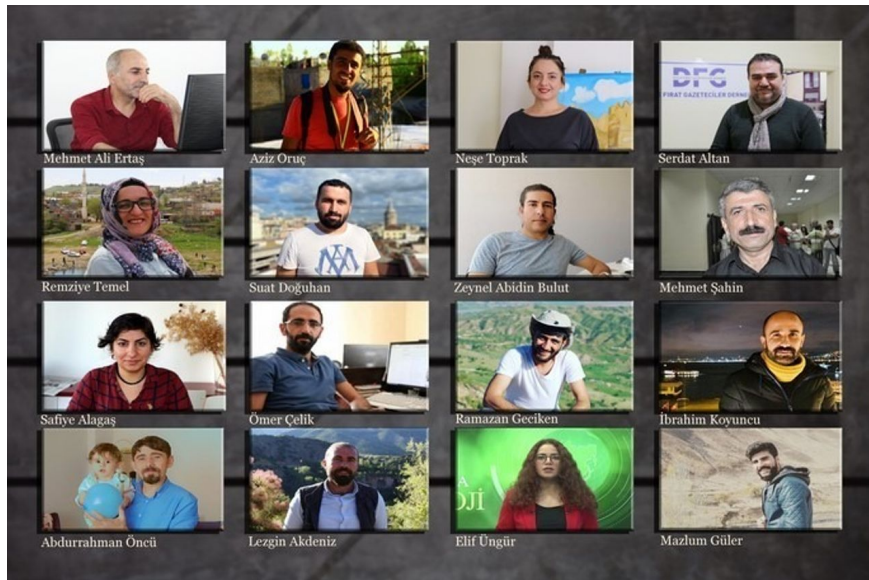


IMAGE: Arrested journalists from Kurdish press. [Credit: Mezopotamya Agency]

Among the arrested journalists are Dicle Fırat Journalists Association (DFG) Co-Chair Serdar Altan, *Xwebûn* Managing Editor Mehmet Ali Ertaş, JinNews Director Safiye Alagaş, JinNews Editor Gülşen Koçuk, and Mezopotamya Agency (MA) Editor Aziz Oruç.

The journalists were arrested on charges of “membership” in the outlawed Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an umbrella group that includes the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) in Iran, and Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PÇDK) in Iraq. This so-called accusation is a pretext that the Turkish state has used for decades to carry out arrests.

According to the Mezopotamya Agency, the investigation, based on testimony from secret and open witnesses, alleges that journalists used interviews with KCK leaders as “instructions” to make TV shows. One of the charges leveled against the arrested journalists is that they made shows for Kurdish television stations abroad.

One charge against Elif Üngür is that she made a TV show on the campaign to free imprisoned Kurdish artist Nûdem Durak, who has been supported by artists such as Roger Waters internationally. Üngür is also accused of showing images of Qamişlo, a town in northeastern Syria held by Kurdish-nationalist forces, in a TV show.

While JinNews Editor Gülşen Koçuk was asked whether she followed the “Justice Watch” campaign for sick prisoners, journalist Lezgin Akdeniz was asked about his phone calls with news sources and his TV show on murders by JITEM. An unofficial state intelligence agency, JITEM was infamous for many unsolved civilian murders in the Kurdish region during the Turkish state’s war on the PKK in the 1990s.

The journalists’ arrest was justified on the grounds that their news reports “informed the group [KCK] about the Turkish Army’s course of action, praised and encouraged the group’s [KCK] acts of force and violence.” Resul Temur, one of the journalists’ lawyers, told the daily *BirGün* that the whole process was full of lawlessness and irregularities.

Temur said that during the 8 days the journalists were in detention, they were not given any information about their case or even shown the detention and confidentiality order. He added, “The prosecutor’s office even told [a journalist during the interrogation:] ‘You

mentioned the ‘Kurdish problem. What kind of problem do Kurds have?’ But they did not record this in the minutes. There was an 80 hour-long content in the investigation, but we couldn’t see it... In fact, we saw that there was no reason for them to be detained.”

These arrests follow a series of police raids on the legal Kurdish-nationalist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and associated parties in Turkey. Earlier this month, 29 executives of the Peoples’ Democratic Congress (HDK), an umbrella organization of which the HDP is also a member, were arrested on charges of “being KCK members” and “making propaganda for the group” as part of an investigation by the Tekirdağ Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office.

On Thursday, 12 people, including journalist Saliha Aras from the *Demokratik Modernite* magazine and executives and members of the HDP, were detained in house raids in Istanbul.

Last week, HDK and several other organizations tried to organize a march from various parts of the country to Gemlik, where PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan is being held on an island named İmralı, to protest the isolation imposed on him. Öcalan has been in prison since 1999. The last time Öcalan was allowed to meet with his lawyers was in August 2019, and the last time he was allowed to make phone calls was in April 2020.

While marches to Gemlik from cities such as Istanbul, Diyarbakır and Van were not allowed, dozens of people were detained during police attacks on the protests. Two of those detained in Kadıköy, İstanbul were arrested.

The mass arrests of Kurdish journalists and increased crackdown on Kurdish politicians comes as the Erdoğan government continues its operation against PKK forces in Iraq and prepares to attack the US-backed, PYD-linked YPG militias in Syria.

On May 23, Erdoğan signaled an invasion into Syria, stating: “We are starting to take new steps soon regarding the remaining parts of the works which we have launched to create 30-kilometer-deep secure zones along our southern borders.”

Ankara has demanded that its NATO allies, particularly Washington, stop supporting the YPG as a proxy force in Syria, and has carried out numerous operations in Syria since 2016 to block the emergence of a Kurdish state on its southern borders. The Turkish

Armed Forces and their Islamist proxies now control around 10 percent of Syria, where 4.4 million people reportedly live.

The latest military announcement came after Erdoğan threatened to veto Sweden's and Finland's request to join NATO against Russia, on the grounds that they support the PKK and YPG.

In early June, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken made clear Washington's opposition to a Turkish invasion targeting its main proxies in Syria. He said: "Any escalation in northern Syria is something that we would oppose, and we support the maintenance of the current ceasefire lines."

The Russian government also criticized Erdogan's plans. "Such a move, in the absence of the agreement of the legitimate government of the Syrian Arab Republic, would be a direct violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, adding: "We hope that Ankara will refrain from actions that could lead to a dangerous deterioration of the already difficult situation in Syria."

Moreover, speaking to RT on June 9, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said: "If there is an invasion, there will be popular resistance in the first stage.... Of course, in the places where the Syrian army is positioned, and it is not deployed to all regions in Syria, and when military conditions allow for confrontation, we will do this."

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), whose backbone is the YPG, said it would respond to a possible Turkish invasion by seeking military support from the Syrian regime. However, the US and Turkey have waged a war for regime against Assad's government since 2011, leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths and turning millions more into refugees.

On June 5, SDF commander Mazloum Abdi said that the Syrian government should use its air defence systems against Turkish planes and that the SDF were "open" to working with Syrian army to fight off Turkish forces.

This points to the potential for a dangerous escalation that could once again pit NATO member state Turkey against Russian-backed Syrian forces. Ankara's preparations to invade Syria and the Kurdish-nationalists' role as a US proxy expose the bankruptcy and

reactionary character of Turkish and Kurdish nationalism, both of which seek to cut deals with imperialism.

The mass arrest of journalists underscores again that democratic rights cannot be defended without opposing war. This requires uniting and mobilizing the growing movement in the working class, independently of all bourgeois parties, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program against militarism and chauvinism.

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