

10 September 2007
JOINT ACTION - TURKEY

International PEN, ARTICLE 19 and IPA call for abolition of Article 301

SOURCE: ARTICLE 19, London

(ARTICLE 19/IFEX) - The following is a joint International PEN, ARTICLE 19 and IPA press release:

International PEN, ARTICLE 19 and the International Publishers Association call for the abolition of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code

Today International PEN, ARTICLE 19 and the International Publishers Association issued an open letter to the newly-elected President of Turkey Abdullah Gül. The letter calls for the abolition of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code.

In the letter the three organizations expressed their deep concern about the impact of Article 301 on the right to freedom of expression in Turkey and its inconsistency with international law.

Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code prohibits public denigration of "Turkishness", a term that is extremely vague and can be easily abused. It has been widely used to repress freedom of expression and open debate in the country. In particular, the letter draws President Gül's attention to the fact that, between April and July 2007, there were 18 trials against 24 people under Article 301.

While welcoming progressive changes to Turkish legislation since mid-1990s, the letter also points to the fact that hopes that the Turkish government might consider the abolition of Article 301 faded away after the assassination of (editor of the Armenian-Turkish weekly Agos) Hrant Dink in January 2007. Mr. Dink had himself been convicted under Article 301 and was handed down a six-month suspended sentence in October 2005. Since his killing, Article 301 trials continue.

The letter also makes reference to the joint declaration of 41 international and national NGOs urging the abolition of Article 301 from the Turkish Penal Code - as well as other provisions violating freedom of expression - issued on 14 February 2007; it further cites the resolution on the same issue adopted by ARTICLE 19, International PEN and the International Publishers Association on 24 November 2006.

The letter urges President Gül to do all in his power to ensure Turkey's compliance with its obligations under international law, particularly through the abolition of Article 301.

The full text of the letter can be downloaded at:
<http://www.article19.org/pdfs/letters/turkey-abolition-of-article-301.pdf>.

The full text of the resolution adopted by ARTICLE 19, International PEN and the International Publishers Association (IPA) on 24 November 2006 can be downloaded at:
<http://www.article19.org/pdfs/letters/turkey-penal-code.pdf>.

For further information, contact Anoush Begoyan, ARTICLE 19 Europe Programme Officer, tel: +44 20 7278 9292, e-mail: anoushb@article19.org; or ARTICLE 19, 6-8 Amwell Street, London, EC1R 1UQ, U.K., tel: +44 20 7278 9292, fax: +44 20 7278 7660, e-mail: info@article19.org, Internet: <http://www.article19.org>

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EXCHANGE (IFEX)
CLEARING HOUSE
555 Richmond St. West, # 1101, PO Box 407 Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V
3B1
tel: +1 416 515 9622 fax: +1 416 515 7879
alerts e-mail: alerts@ifex.org general e-mail: ifex@ifex.org
Internet site: <http://www.ifex.org/>