

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION



Ragip Zarakolu - Turkey

Ragip Zarakolu's staunch belief in freedom of expression, his vocal campaign against book bannings and his persistence in publishing works that violate Turkey's repressive censorship laws have resulted in a series of indictments dating back to the early 1970s. In 1971, a military government assumed power in Turkey and instituted a crackdown on writers it deemed subversive. Following a conviction and a three-year stay in prison, Zarakolu steadfastly refused to abandon his campaign for freedom of thought, striving for an "attitude of respect for different thoughts and cultures to become widespread in Turkey."

In the 30 years since his release, Zarakolu has continued to defy Turkey's censorship laws, especially Article 312 of Turkey's Penal Code, which outlaws "making divisive propaganda via publication." The Belge Publishing House, which Zarakolu owns, operated under a barrage of charges brought by Turkish authorities against he and his late wife, Ayse Nur. Over the years, such charges resulted in further imprisonment for the couple, the wholesale confiscation and destruction of books, and the imposition of heavy fines.

Since his wife's death in 2002, Zarakolu has continued to face numerous prosecutions. He is currently on trial for an article published in the journal *Ozgur Politika* on March 8, 2003. The article was entitled "Sana Ne" ("Of No Interest") and its lambasting of what Zarakolu describes as Turkey's "aggressive and derogatory language used against the Kurdish region in Iraq" has seen the publisher once again fall foul of Article 312. Convictions under Article 312 carry sentences of between six months and two years.

May 17, 2005, was the second hearing of the case against Zarakolu related to the publication of George Jerjian's book, *History Will Free All of Us/Turkish-Armenian Conciliation*. However, the hearing was postponed to September 20 to enable commentary by "experts". Five days earlier, on May 12, Zarakolu was before another court for another hearing of the Sana Ne case. This hearing was adjourned to October 11. Hearings scheduled for February 15, 2006, were adjourned to April 19.

PEN Canada considers the charges brought against Ragip Zarakolu to be in direct conflict with his right to free expression as guaranteed by Articles 19 and 22 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is calling for the immediate and unconditional discontinuation of further legal processes against him.