

KURDISH HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT NEWSLINE

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KHRP Mission Investigates Human Rights Situation in Southeast Turkey

A KHRP fact-finding mission travelled to southeast Turkey in early May to investigate the human rights situation there, with a particular focus on women's access to justice, impunity for state agents, issues affecting the work of human rights defenders and the human rights impact of 'high security zones'.

Beginning on 2 May, the mission met with interviewees including local mayors, human rights activists, lawyers and journalists in the provinces of Diyarbakır, Mardin, Siirt and Şırnak. Mission members also visited villages that were forcibly evacuated during the conflict in the region in the 1990s.

The mission found that women in the areas visited had little or no access to justice, with key obstacles including language barriers and efforts



KHRP mission members Edel Hughes and Saniye Karakaş with representatives of women's rights organisations in Diyarbakır.

on the part of state officials to convince women who make complaints that they ought to drop the issue and return to their homes. Women's access to justice is further restricted by a requirement that they

must prove that they have no income in order to access legal aid. The mission heard that it takes almost three weeks to obtain such proof and that this is far too long in urgent cases,

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KHRP and Spring Projects Host Evening of Kurdish Culture to Raise Funds for Halabja Playground Project

KHRP and Spring Projects co-hosted a fundraising event on 11 June in support of the Halabja Community Play Project, a scheme led by photographer Tom Carrigan to construct a playground designed by local children in the town in Kurdistan, Iraq, which remains impoverished and neglected more than 20 years after the chemical attacks that killed thousands there in March 1988.

The event took place at Spring's Ten SP bar in Kentish Town, London, and showcased creativity from the Kurdish



(From left) KHRP Chair Mark Muller QC, Deputy Director Rachel Bernu, Michael Leatheren of the Big Lottery Fund, and KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız at the fundraising event.

regions. This included a programme of contemporary short films made in and by directors from the region, such as Bawke

(Dad) by Hisham Zaman, Satellite by Rahim Zebeihy and Shoes

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Director's Letter



Dear Friends,

We at KHRP have pursued all aspects of our work with the same commitment and dedication as always over the past few months, with particular successes in our training, fact-finding and awareness-raising activities.

In early May we dispatched representatives to the Kurdish regions of Turkey to gather information on the human rights situation there. Focusing their research on women's access to justice, impunity of state agents, the environment for human rights defenders, and the impact of extraordinary security measures put in place in parts of the region in 2007, the mission was disappointed to find that the situation remains deeply troubling on all these fronts.

Also in May, KHRP held a successful training session for human rights defenders in Şırnak on using international legal mechanisms to combat torture and other forms of ill-treatment prohibited under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

On the litigation front, we have pressed ahead with our European Court of Human

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such as those involving domestic violence.

The mission was told that sanctions provided for in Turkish family law, such as those allowing for a man to be excluded from the family home in cases of domestic abuse, are rarely imposed and that, where they are used, they are not policed. Where abused women manage to secure a place in a shelter, police officers are reported to frequently give information about the whereabouts of such refuges to perpetrators. The mission also found that national government programmes to raise awareness of women's rights have not covered the Kurdish regions.

The mission found that harassment and repression of those who voice non-violent criticism of the state remains endemic. Human rights defenders interviewed by mission members reported that they are subjected to investigations whenever they take action, and almost all had multiple cases open against them at the time of the mission. This type of intimidation is so common that it



Mission members meeting with the Chair of the Siirt branch of İHD, Vetha Aydın, and displaced women.



The mission is shown around the village of Kırkpınar (Heridan) in Dicle, Diyarbakır province, residents of which were forcibly displaced in 1993.

has come to be viewed as simply normal and inevitable.

With regard to impunity of

state officials operating in the region, the mission heard that such individuals are rarely pros-

ecuted in cases of alleged human rights violations and that, in those instances where they are prosecuted and convicted, they generally received very light or suspended sentences.

Questions of impunity and access to justice have been pushed to the fore recently by the ongoing trial in Turkey of alleged members of the ultra-nationalist 'Ergenekon' network, which has been linked to crimes including extra-judicial killings and bombings. Those on trial include retired military officers and politicians.

Concerns about the human rights situation in Turkey has also been underlined recently by a wave of arrests of hundreds of individuals including human rights defenders, union members and pro-Kurdish political activists, following local elections in late March.

'Unfortunately this latest fact-finding mission confirmed that the human rights situation in the Kurdish regions remains deeply alarming,' said KHRP Deputy Director Rachel Bernu, who took part in the mission. 'Missions such as this serve a vital purpose in highlighting such problems and developing recommendations for how to address them.'

Rights (ECtHR) casework. This includes ongoing cases on behalf of civilian victims of Turkish military operations in northern Iraq, as well as a student barred from university in Turkey for wearing a beard, in a case which goes to the heart of questions surrounding public expressions of religiosity within Turkey's strongly secular political framework. In addition, we have begun work on a new case on behalf of an applicant who was arrested as a student in Ankara and faces over six years in jail in Turkey for her involvement in pro-Kurdish political activism.

Throughout recent months, KHRP has also continued to raise awareness of the alarming human rights situation in the Kurdish regions in our contacts with influential indi-

viduals all over the world. This has included activities as diverse as making a submission to the Obama administration urging a redoubling of efforts to reach a peaceful, democratic solution to the ongoing conflict in Turkey, and sharing our expertise in meetings with journalists, academics and staff at various embassies in Ankara and Brussels.

Meanwhile, developments in the Kurdish regions have continued to underscore the importance of such work. With presidential elections looming in Iran, the authorities have kept up their use of arbitrary detention, unfair trials and severe punishments in order to repress journalists, human rights defenders and others who exercise their right to freedom of expression. In recent months, this

has included Kurdish activists marking International Labour Day and others calling for greater protection of women's rights.

Likewise in Syria, there have been a series of further cases of individuals engaged in Kurdish political movements receiving lengthy jail sentences on such spurious charges as 'weakening national sentiments'.

Meanwhile, there has been an alarming wave of arrests of trade unionists, human rights defenders and pro-Kurdish politicians in Turkey in the wake of local elections in late March, along with growing reports of torture, beatings, death threats and treason charges in Kurdistan, Iraq.

Turning to the future, KHRP will continue to respond proactively to such threats,

with a busy schedule of trainings, missions, litigation, publications and other activities planned for the coming months, including our annual Legal Team meeting in late June and a training in Armenia in July on implementation of judgments of the ECtHR. In the meantime, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to all our partners, funders and other supporters whose commitment to our work plays such an important role in realising our objectives. Your contributions, along with those of our staff, interns and volunteers, continue to make a real difference in countless lives in the Kurdish regions.

Kerim Yıldız
Executive Director
June 2009

KHRP Conducts Training on Torture and Ill-Treatment in Şırnak

KHRP representatives carried out a training on legal protections against torture and ill-treatment in Şırnak province in southeast Turkey on 3 May for over 35 participants from the Şırnak Bar Association, which hosted the event, and the Şırnak branch of the Turkish Medical Association.

Nuşirevan Elçi, President of the Şırnak Bar Association, and Rachel Bernu, Deputy Director of KHRP, opened the day's events by outlining the aims and objectives of the training programme and discussing the contemporary situation in Şırnak with regard to torture.

The lifting of a 25-year state of emergency in the southeast in 2002 led to a reduction in the number of extrajudicial killings and instances of torture. However, the situation in the region has become more alarming since the declaration of a 'high security zone' in Şırnak and the neighbouring provinces of Hakkari and Siirt in June 2007.

Dr Edel Hughes, a lecturer at the University of Limerick



Saniye Karakaş and Dr Edel Hughes lead the training.



Training participants apply their knowledge in discussions of hypothetical case studies.

School of Law and a member of KHRP's Legal Team, led seminars on the international legal

standards pertaining to torture and ill-treatment, and the mechanisms available for pro-

moting enforcement of these standards. Later in the day, she and KHRP Legal Associate Saniye Karakaş led attendees through workshops in which they were presented with scenarios involving hypothetical cases of torture and ill-treatment, and were asked to identify the violations in question and develop a plan for reporting them to the appropriate international bodies.

The event was tailored in response to requests from participants at previous successful KHRP trainings in conjunction with the Şırnak Bar Association, who had asked for further guidance on the practicalities of submitting appeals to international bodies.

'Events such as these are a core element of KHRP's efforts to strengthen independent capacity for human rights enforcement in the Kurdish regions,' said Rachel Bernu. 'As always, the enthusiasm and diligence of participants reflected the huge appetite for this kind of training amongst local human rights defenders.'

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KHRP and Spring Projects Host Evening of Kurdish Culture to Raise Funds for Halabja Playground Project

by Shahram Namiq. In attendance were some of the artists, filmmakers, donors and project participants, including Delfina Entrecanales, Michael Leatheren of the Big Lottery Fund, and filmmaker Tony Grisoni.

The event also profiled *Kurds: Through the Photographer's Lens*, a collection of photographs, poetry and writing commissioned by the Delfina Foundation to celebrate 15 years of work by KHRP. There was an exhibition of photographs from the book and copies were on sale throughout the evening.

During an interval in the film screenings, KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız gave a short speech on why KHRP is proud



Images from Kurds: Through the Photographer's Lens on display during the event.

to be able to support this project. He then introduced Tom Carrigan, a long-time friend and supporter of KHRP, who described the lack of facilities for children in Halabja and the dangers that they face playing in the streets. He went on to

outline the philosophy of the playground scheme, which, by involving children at every stage in the design and construction process, gives them a strong sense of ownership over the project. He described how, in the course of a series of daily

play sessions and initial building work in March and April this year, children and others in the local community had developed an enthusiasm for the project and built up a relationship of trust with those running it.

Steps planned for the coming months include sinking a well on the land, raising further funds, planting trees and landscaping the site, and building adaptable, bespoke play equipment.

'KHRP is delighted to have the opportunity to support such a creative and innovative scheme,' said Kerim Yıldız. 'More than 20 years after the traumatic events of the late 1980s, Halabja remains neglected. Its children deserve this chance to play a lead role in this exciting project.'

KHRP Makes Submission to ECtHR in Case of Student Arrested in Turkey for Political Activism

KHRP submitted a 'stop the clock' letter to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on 22 May in the case of Zelal Özgökçe, who faces more than six years in jail in Turkey over her involvement in pro-Kurdish political activism when she was a student. A 'stop the clock' letter essentially introduces the application, including the nature of the violations and complaints to the court, and notifies the court of an impending full application.

Ms Özgökçe was arrested in Ankara in February 2002 and accused of membership of an illegal organisation. At the time, she was studying at Van University and was a member of the youth commission of the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HADEP), which has since been banned. She denied

being a member of an illegal organisation and told the Ankara State Security Court that her role with HADEP included various activities in the organisation's youth commission such as awareness-raising activities, selling publications and issuing press releases.

She was eventually released on 28 May 2002 after more than three months in detention, during which time she was unable to continue her studies. However, in October 2005 she was sentenced to a total of six years and three months' imprisonment by the Ankara 11th High Criminal Court. Although the Court of Cassation overturned this decision in October 2006 and referred the case back to the Ankara 11th High Criminal Court for reconsideration, the same court in Ankara neverthe-

less passed the same sentence again on 1 April 2008. This time round, in a decision reached in November 2008, the Court of Cassation upheld the judgement.

Since HADEP was only banned in Turkey after Ms Özgökçe's arrest, she asserts that the actions for which she was prosecuted were entirely lawful at the time. Around the time that HADEP was proscribed, the EU warned Turkey that such a move would seriously damage bilateral relations. Moreover, the ECtHR has frequently condemned the practice in Turkey of banning successive pro-Kurdish parties.

Ms Özgökçe's case raises a number of human rights concerns that have surfaced in previous KHRP-assisted cases against Turkey, including free-

dom of expression, freedom of association, and cultural and linguistic rights. As a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and a member of the Council of Europe, Turkey is obliged to respect the rights of Kurds and other minorities to participate in the democratic process.

The findings of the ECtHR in Ms Özgökçe's case could also have implications for the pro-Kurdish Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party, DTP), which prosecutors in Turkey are currently seeking to shut down. Many DTP officials are currently facing criminal proceedings and its members have been targeted in a wave of arrests since local elections at the end of March.

European Parliament Passes Resolution on Turkey Progress Report

KHRP welcomed a resolution passed by the European Parliament in March in response to the European Commission's recent report on the progress made by Turkey towards EU accession in 2008.

The resolution underlined the finding of the Commission's 2008 Progress Report that the Turkish government has failed to reverse what has been a continuous slowdown of the reform programme since its inauguration in 2005. The Parliament therefore urged the development of cross-party consensus on an active reform process based on respect for

human rights and the rule of law, including welcoming political parties, ethnic and religious minorities and civil society entities in the drafting of a new constitution.

Regarding specific human rights issues, the Parliament noted that freedom of expression and freedom of the press are still not sufficiently protected, and specifically called for the repeal of the notorious Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which criminalises criticism of the state. Other matters of concern to the Parliament include the growing number of cases of torture and ill-treat-

ment, with such abuses largely left unprosecuted.

The resolution also underlines that the continuing violence and hostility shown towards minorities in Turkey is intolerable. In particular, it calls for a concerted effort to improve the cultural rights of Kurdish citizens.

Welcoming the resolution, KHRP Deputy Director Rachel Bernu said, 'KHRP supports Turkish accession to the EU, as long as this process includes comprehensive reforms to ensure that the systemic failures underlying existing patterns of human rights violations

are addressed. Although the Parliament's resolution emphasises many of the problems highlighted by the Commission, we reiterate our disappointment that other areas of concern were not adequately covered by the Progress Report - including, for example, the human rights implications of cross-border bombardments by the Turkish military.'

KHRP own detailed response to the Commission's 2008 Progress Report, which was published in November last year, can be downloaded from our website.



CALL FOR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

KHRP are currently looking to increase their Board, and are looking in particular for people with experience in finance, communications, fundraising and medicine. For more information about KHRP's activities or on how to become a Board member, please contact Anna Irvin at airvin@khrp.org

KHRP Speaks at Alternative Water Forum in İstanbul

KHRP Development and Outreach Officer Anna Irvin delivered a speech at the third Alternative Water Forum, which took place at Bilgi University in İstanbul on 20 to 22 March.

The Forum was organised by civil society groups and NGOs in response to the nearby meeting of the Fifth World Water Forum under the aegis of the World Water Council. The latter included mostly representatives from states or private companies, whereas the goal of the Alternative Water Forum was to create a space where civil society actors could participate in the debate on water policy and management.

Sharing a panel during the session titled 'Hegemony, War and Water Policy', which also included Nick Hildyard from KHRP's partner organisation The Corner House, Anna Irvin spoke about 'The Impact of Large-Scale Dam Construction on Regional Security in the Kurdish Regions of Turkey'. The



The banner which led to the deportation of two members of the International Rivers Network.

speech addressed the fallout of the construction of the Ilisu Dam in southeast Turkey, both for surrounding communities within Turkey and also in the downstream states of Iraq and Syria.

Emphasis was placed on the motives behind the construction of the dam, which would displace up to 78,000 people, mainly Kurds. It was argued that, far from being a solution to the socioeconomic problems of southeast Turkey, the

project, which has gone ahead without meaningful consultation with those affected, would not directly benefit local residents and would bring increased conflict rather than security.

Also present at the Alternative Forum was İpek Taşlı of the Keep Hasankeyf Alive Initiative, who was arrested whilst undertaking field research in relation to the Ilisu Dam in December 2008, detained without access to a lawyer and accused of

'making propaganda for a terrorist organisation'. This, along with the deportation of two members of the International Rivers Network for unfurling a banner at the World Water Forum that read 'No Risky Dams', highlighted the point made in the speech that the Turkish state views opposition to the Dam as a threat to national integrity and is prepared to repress such opposition under the guise of counter-terrorism.

The Alternative Water Forum culminated in the İstanbul Declaration, which discusses alternative water management policies. The water justice movement seeks to end the corporate control of water resources and to ensure that all people have access to clean and affordable water. Recognising the significance of the conference's location, the final declaration specifically addresses the situation in southeast Turkey.

KHRP Letter to President Obama Urges American Support for Resolution to Kurdish Conflict

KHRP has written to United States President Barack Obama urging his administration to keep in mind the rights and freedoms of those living in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and the Caucasus as he works on revising US foreign policy.

The letter stressed that the US, as Turkey's most powerful and influential strategic

partner, is in a strong position to encourage Turkey to work towards a political resolution to the conflict in the Kurdish regions of the country. Other issues raised in the letter included the disproportionate number of cases against Turkey before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2008, representing over 11 per cent of the Court's total caseload,

and the disastrous effects of Turkish military incursions into Kurdistan, Iraq on local civilian populations, including widespread displacement and destruction of property.

The authors also urged President Obama's administration to press the governments of Iran and Syria on the serious human rights concerns affecting people living in the Kurdish

regions of both countries.

The letter underlined the breadth of KHRP's own work to promote protection of the human rights of all those living in the Kurdish regions – including fact-finding missions, trial observations, strategic litigation and advocacy – as well as the organisation's 90 per cent success rate in cases before the ECtHR.

KHRP Speaks at Centre for Applied Human Rights at York University

KHRP delivered a successful workshop for students at the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York on 13 May 2009, as part of the Centre's new Applied Human Rights MA programme.

The three-hour workshop, delivered by Acting Legal Officer Saadiya Chaudary, began with a brief presentation outlining the human rights situation

in the Kurdish regions and the work that KHRP has done over the years to address this situation. This was followed by an explanation of the mechanisms involved in promoting protection of human rights within the European framework, including the European Social Charter, the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture, the Framework Convention for the

Protection of National Minorities and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

The presentation went on to explain the process of filing and pursuing applications before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), including issues such as registration and examination of the case, interim measures, fact-finding missions by the Court, admissibility criteria,

friendly settlements, and judgment and enforcement.

Later in the workshop, participants were given several hypothetical scenarios involving potential applications to the ECtHR and were asked to develop advice for the applicants based on their knowledge of the Court and the legislative framework in which it operates.

Dispatches

KHRP Consultant on Women and Children's Rights Addresses House of Lords Meeting on Situation of Kurds in Turkey



(From left) Margaret Owen and Lord Hylton at the meeting, along with Muharrem Erbey, Chair of the Diyarbakir branch of the Human Rights Association of Turkey.

KHRP Consultant on Women and Children's Rights Margaret Owen spoke at a public meeting at the House of Lords on 12 May titled 'Turkey After the Elections: New Prospects for a Solution to the Kurdish Question?.'

The event was an opportunity for Ms Owen and other members of a delegation who had acted as observers during local elections in Turkey at the end of March to report back on their findings. The meeting was hosted by Lord Hylton, who also took part in the delegation. During their time in Turkey, delegation members also observed trial proceedings against Kurdish politician and Sakharov Prize laureate Leyla Zana.

Executive Director Gives Talk at Columbia University

KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız was welcomed at the Harriman Institute for Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies at Columbia University on 28 May, where he addressed a group of around 25 people on the human rights situation in Turkey following the elections in March this year. The talk focused on issues such as restrictions on freedom of expression, violations of civil and political rights, and cultural and minority rights, and the need for dialogue to resolve longstanding problems. The event was moderated by Kamal Soleimani, a doctoral candidate in Middle Eastern Studies at Columbia University. Also in attendance were representatives from the Washington office of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq, as well as a representative from the Turkish Embassy in New York. The speech, which was well received by all in attendance, was followed by a reception.

KHRP Chair Speaks at Norwegian Bar Association Conference in Oslo



Mark Muller in Oslo with KHRP Legal Team member Arild Humlen.

KHRP Chair Mark Muller QC addressed a conference hosted by the Norwegian Bar Association in Oslo on 28 May entitled 'Combating Terrorism and Legal Safeguards', which engaged with the question of how to protect fundamental freedoms in a political context strongly influenced by counter-terrorism concerns.

Mark Muller's speech, 'Terrorism, Proscription and the Right to Resist in an Age of Conflict', explored the tensions between counter-terror mechanisms and the legally-recognised principle of self-determination, arguing that the lack of an internationally agreed definition of terrorism increases the scope for oppressive regimes to use the struggle against terrorism as a justification for denying self-determination.

KHRP has long argued that current Turkish counter-terrorism legislation fails to meet the country's international human rights obligations. Amended laws that came into force in 2006 have introduced an alarmingly vague definition of terrorism, undermine procedural safeguards in custody and fair trial rights, and threaten the freedoms of expression and association.

'It is crucial that states should not sacrifice the protection of basic human rights in the course of their efforts to enhance national security,' said KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız. 'We take this opportunity to again call on the Turkish authorities to ensure that application of anti-terror legislation is in compliance with international human rights law.'

KHRP Addresses European Parliament Seminar on Human Rights and the Kurds



Rachel Bernu addressing the European Parliament seminar.

KHRP took part in a seminar hosted by the Swedish MEP Jens Holm at the European Parliament on 29 April, titled 'The Kurdish Human Rights Situation, a Lasting Peace and a Democratic Development'.

KHRP Deputy Director Rachel Bernu delivered a speech on the theme 'The Turkish Accession and the Need for Change', focusing on the necessity for Turkey, the European Union and the international community as a whole to modify their approach to the Kurdish issue in order to keep Ankara's accession hopes alive, and calling for greater international involvement in resolving the ongoing conflict.

The speech focused on systemic issues which have stalled necessary human rights reforms in relation to Turkey's

treatment of its Kurdish population, including an extremely narrow definition of minorities and an overwhelming tendency to equate advocacy for Kurdish civil, political and economic rights with threats to national security. This is paralleled by Turkey's historic and current treatment of the Kurdish issue as a simple question of security, rather than seeing it in the context of legitimate claims for cultural, linguistic and civil rights.

KHRP argued that the EU should unite in emphasising the multidimensional nature of the conflict in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, and the political and social consequences of prolonging it, especially in the context of Turkey's ambitions for eventual EU membership.

Dispatches

Executive Director Nominated for Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award

KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız has been nominated for the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award for his efforts to advance protection of the human rights of all people living in the Kurdish regions.

The award is bestowed annually by the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights and recognises individuals for their commitment to social justice throughout the world. The Center offers monetary backing and a five-year partnership programme to support laureates in the fight for justice.

Past winners of the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award have included activists involved in the campaign against apartheid in South Africa, provision of medical treatment to victims of torture in Darfur, and promotion of the economic and social rights of residents of New Orleans displaced from their homes by Hurricane Katrina.

Executive Director and Dr Susan Breau to Publish New Book on International Law and the Kurdish Conflict



Kerim Yıldız and Susanne Dr Susan Breau sign the contract for their new book.

KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız and Dr Susan Breau, a Reader in Law at the University of Surrey, have signed a contract with the publisher Routledge to author a book provisionally titled *The Kurdish Conflict: International Humanitarian Law and Post-Conflict Mechanisms*. The book, due for release in 2010, will provide a comprehensive legal analysis of the conflict in the Kurdish regions, thus filling a crucial gap in the existing academic literature on the subject.

Dispatches

KHRP Takes Part in Conference on Protection for Human Rights Defenders

KHRP took part in a conference on 'Security and Protection for Human Rights Defenders' at London Metropolitan University on 29 April.

Organised by Peace Brigades International UK, the Human Rights and Social Justice Research Institute, London Metropolitan University and the All Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, the event tackled the existing framework for protection of human rights defenders, regional trends in security risks, and strategies for addressing repressive trends and gaps in the protection of human rights defenders.

The keynote address was delivered by Margaret Sekaggya, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, who spoke about why the international community needs such activists. Other panellists included representatives of the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and a range of NGOs engaged in improving protection for human rights defenders.

KHRP Takes Part in Chatham House Meetings with Barzani and Türk

KHRP representatives have taken part in meetings at Chatham House with leading Kurdish political figures from Turkey and Iraq.

On 21 April 2009, KHRP staff members Mustafa Gündoğdu and Anna Irvin attended an event with *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (Democratic Society Party, DTP) leader Ahmet Türk, entitled 'Turkey After the Local Elections'. Discussions at the meeting focused on the aftermath of the March elections, marked by a wave of arrests of pro-Kurdish political activists, along with human rights defenders, union members and others.

Earlier, in March, Janna Manicini of KHRP attended a meeting with Massoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, which included discussion of the region's political and economic prospects, and issues of democracy and human rights.

KHRP Speaks on Female Genital Mutilation at SOAS



Pranjali Acharya speaking at the SOAS event, alongside organiser Thomas Herzmark.

KHRP gave a presentation on 'The Practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the Kurdish Regions' at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London on 29 April. The speech was delivered by Development Officer Pranjali Acharya at a screening of 'Handful of Ash', a gritty yet sensitive documentary by Kurdish filmmaker Nabaz Ahmad, which explores the causes and effects of FGM in rural areas in the Kurdish regions through the personal experiences of women.

Research in recent years suggests that in Kurdistan, Iraq up to 70 per cent of women may have suffered the practice. It is thought to be particularly prevalent in poorer areas and amongst internally displaced persons. In KHRP's experience, to date there is little hard evidence of FGM amongst Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iran or Syria, though that by no means confirms that it is not practiced in those countries.

The speech placed the practice of FGM in a context defined by gender-based discrimination grounded in patriarchal social structures, regional underdevelopment, limited access to political representation, inadequate legal remedies

and the impact of conflict. It also warned against a tendency amongst some Kurds to disregard women's rights in the name of prioritising political struggles.

At the same time, Pranjali noted some reasons for cautious optimism with regard to efforts to combat FGM, including increasing awareness and public debate about the practice and an attempt, albeit abortive, that was made in 2007 to pass anti-FGM legislation in Kurdistan, Iraq.

The speech also outlined some of the tactics that KHRP has successfully used to promote women's rights over the years, including European Court of Human Rights casework and capacity-building workshops for tribal leaders, women, NGOs, human rights activists and those in government, as well as efforts to mainstream gender issues as part of broader discussions about human rights and the welfare of communities as a whole.

The evening was organised by the Kurdish Studies and Students' Organisation (KSSO). Arvid Vormann of WADI, a German NGO working in Kurdistan, Iraq, also spoke at the event.

Baku-Ceyhan Campaign Representatives Face Intimidation in Azerbaijan



Construction work on the Georgia section of the pipeline.

KHRP was alarmed to learn in April that representatives of its partners in the Baku-Ceyhan Campaign had been detained and intimidated by police during a research mission in Azerbaijan.

Representatives of KHRP's partner organisations Platform and the Centre for Civic Initiatives (CCI) were visiting the village of Hajalli in the district of Samukh as part of an investigation into whether British Petroleum is fulfilling its commitments to local residents affected by the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline. In the course of their visit, they were arbitrarily detained by security forces for approximately three hours, faced intimidation and threats for asking questions about the pipeline, and had documents confiscated. Villagers also faced intimidation and subsequently expressed fears that they would lose their jobs as punishment for speaking to Platform and CCI.

The research mission is

part of ongoing work that the Baku-Ceyhan Campaign has been undertaking for several years, which includes investigating reported practices and policies of the states and companies involved in the pipeline project that have infringed on villagers' rights to property and livelihood, and that have also resulted in allegations of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment.

'The BTC pipeline has already caused substantial environmental damage and incidents like this only serve to underline the lack of transparency surrounding the project and serious concerns about the treatment of those whose lives have been affected by it,' said KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız. 'The Azerbaijani authorities and all parties involved in the BTC pipeline must take all necessary steps to ensure that the villagers caught up in this incident face no further punitive measures, and that research of this kind is proactively facilitated rather than obstructed.'

Dispatches

Wave of Arrests Follows Local Elections in Turkey

KHRP is alarmed by a wave of arrests which began in the wake of local elections in Turkey in late March and which were ongoing in June. Hundreds of people who have been detained include human rights defenders, union members, lawyers and Kurdish political activists.

This has included arrests of individuals working with KHRP's partner organisation in Turkey *İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Human Rights Association, İHD). Four people associated with the organisation were held for two days from 12 May and were subsequently banned from travelling abroad. One of them, İHD Executive Committee member Filiz Kalaycı, was then rearrested on 28 May.

Also on 28 May, security forces detained Yüksel Mutlu, a spokesperson for the Turkish Assembly for Peace human rights group. Her case was reportedly declared confidential, thus preventing lawyers from meeting with her or examining the evidence against her, in clear violation of international fair trial principles.

Others detained in operations across the country on the same day included members of the Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (KESK). Members of the pro-Kurdish *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (Democratic Society Party, DTP) have also been rounded up.

'It is extremely disappointing to see this regression towards familiar patterns of repression,' said KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız. 'Moves such as these only serve to underscore the fragility of the limited advances that have been made in the context of Turkey's progress towards European Union accession. We urge the Turkish government to engage in constructive dialogue with those who peacefully criticise the state, rather than silencing them with repressive tactics.'

Arrests in Iran as Presidential Election Approaches

The Iranian authorities have continued to target Kurdish activists and others who exercise their right to freedom of expression in recent weeks, in the run-up to presidential elections scheduled to take place later in the year.

On 1 May, for example, Iranian intelligence officers summoned five prominent labour activists to the offices of the Ministry of Intelligence in Sanandaj, the capital of Kordestan province. As activists gathered to mark International Workers' Day in Amirieh, the main square in Sanandaj, police and plain-clothed officers allegedly attempted to grab the demonstrators' placards and, when met with resistance, attacked and arrested several activists. According to the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, at least ten were arrested. On the same day, police also detained over 100 people in a similar demonstration in Laleh Park, Tehran.

Freedom of the press was dealt a further blow on 16 May as reformist newspaper Yas-e-no was shut down on the orders of the Commission for Press Authorisation and Surveillance. The closure came only a day after the paper had re-opened following a five-year legal battle which had been ongoing since its offices were previously raided and closed in February 2004.

There has also been ongoing targeting of individuals campaigning for women's rights. In April, a prison sentence handed down to Hana Abdi, a member of the Azarmehr Association of Kurdish Women, was reportedly overturned by an appeals court only to be replaced with a fine equivalent to around 30,000 US dollars. The case against Ms Abdi related to alleged 'gatherings and conspiracies to endanger national security'.

KHRP Speaks at Seminar on Minority Language Rights in Turkey



Margaret Owen, Mark Muller and Robert Olson at the Garden Court seminar.

KHRP spoke at a seminar entitled 'The Language Question: Influence on the Kurdish Question in Turkey, 2007-2009', which took place at Garden Court Chambers, London on 6 April under the aegis of the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC) and the Peace in Kurdistan Campaign.

Hosted by BHRC and KHRP Chairman Mark Muller, the seminar featured presentations by Dr Robert Olson, Professor of Middle East Politics at the University of Kentucky, and Margaret Owen, KHRP Advisor on Women and Children's Rights. The focus of the evening was the situation of Kurdish language rights in Turkey and how this relates to the social, cultural and economic position of the country's Kurds, as well as broader patterns of conflict in the region.

Professor Olson, the author of seven books and over 90 research articles on Middle Eastern history and Kurdish nationalism, spoke about his research into the

significance of language rights in relation to recent local elections in Turkey. Margaret Owen discussed her experiences as part of a team sent to monitor the elections, and her observations about the role of Kurdish identity in election campaigning.

There are strict controls on use of Kurdish and other minority languages in the media in Turkey, public schooling in Kurdish is illegal, and Kurdish politicians face prosecution and harassment for such acts as providing public services in Kurdish or speaking the language in official settings.

'Turkey is obliged under European and international human rights law to respect the cultural and linguistic rights of Kurds and other minorities,' said KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yildiz. 'The current situation marginalises the country's Kurdish population and disadvantages Kurds in education, in the job market and in countless other walks of life.'

ECtHR Rules Against Turkey in Military 'Suicide' Case

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found Turkey in violation of the right to life on 24 March in relation to the supposed suicide of a soldier in the Turkish gendarmerie, in an episode which bears comparison with a number of cases filed with KHRP assistance.

Mustafa Beker was alleged to have shot himself in the head in 2001 but his family were made suspicious by a series of odd circumstances surrounding his death. Though several people were present in the room when he supposedly killed himself, all of them denied witnessing anything. A pathologist concluded that the right-handed Mr Beker had shot himself in the left temple, though a military prosecutor later inconsistently claimed that he had shot himself in the right side of the head. The gun in question was also said to have been fired twice, followed by a third unsuccessful attempt to fire it. Furthermore, no attempt was made to gather fingerprints from the gun or from a locker from which Mr Beker was said to have stolen the weapon.

The Court considered that the investigation

which had been carried out at the domestic level was clearly inadequate and left so many obvious questions unanswered that judges were unable to accept the conclusion that Mr Beker committed suicide. Consequently, the Court concluded that the government had failed to account for this death and was in violation of Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Two KHRP cases dealing with supposed suicides of members of the Turkish military were recently declared inadmissible by the ECtHR. A further KHRP-assisted case is ongoing before the ECtHR on behalf of two Applicants whose son died whilst carrying out his military service in 2004. While the authorities explained his death as a suicide, the Applicants question this assertion.

Human rights organisations such as Amnesty International have in the past noted concerns about ill-treatment and persecution in the Turkish armed forces, particularly in relation to individuals of Kurdish origin, in connection with suspicious deaths of young men completing their military service.

Dispatches

KHRP Welcomes International PEN Campaign in Support of Writers on Minority Rights in Iran

KHRP welcomed a campaign launched by International PEN on 15 May to raise awareness of the plight of writers in Iran who speak out on the issue of minority rights.

Since President Ahmadinejad came to power in Iran in 2005, there has been a marked crackdown on those who criticise the political status quo. Members of minority communities have been particularly vulnerable, with Kurdish, Azeri and Arab writers targeted for calling for greater protection of their cultural and political rights. In the weeks leading up to presidential elections in June, International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee is campaigning to focus attention on such cases.

'Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of an open, democratic society,' said KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız. 'We wholeheartedly support this campaign and call upon the government of Iran to abide by its obligations under international human rights law and respect the basic right of individuals from all sectors of society to freely voice peaceful opinions.'

KHRP has long sought to raise awareness of human rights violations committed against Kurdish and other writers in Iran, including arbitrary detention, torture and application of the death penalty. KHRP also liaises with UN human rights mechanisms to share information and to urge action in relation to individual cases of writers who face such abuses because of their work.

More information about ways of participating in the International PEN campaign – including lobbying the Iranian and other governments, and raising the issue of freedom of expression in Iran in your local press – can be obtained by emailing cathy.mccann@internationalpen.org.uk

Dispatches

KHRP Attends Volunteer Fairs



Akiko Saikawa, Matt Malone, Jori Knight-Jones and Di Lu.

KHRP has continued to promote its internship and volunteering programmes at a series of university events.

Research interns Şükran Kavak and Akiko Saikawa attended the City Law School Pro Bono Fair on 26 March, which gave students the chance to find out more about opportunities for pro bono work with more than 25 organisations represented on the day. KHRP Administrator Jori Knight-Jones, along with resources and communications intern Matt Malone, research intern Di Lu and former research intern Aditi Surie von Czechowski, also took part in two volunteering events for students at the School of Oriental and African Studies in May and June. Students at all of the events showed a great deal of interest in interning and volunteering with KHRP, with many exchanging contact details in order to follow up on their discussions.

Interns and volunteers play a key role in all aspects of KHRP's work. Current opportunities include legal internships, resources and communications internships, development and funding internships, and research internships. We are also recruiting for an Iran and Syria Desk Officer on a voluntary basis. More information is available at www.khrp.org.

SPREADING THE WORD

KHRP has continued to play a leading role in informing political, media and academic analyses of developments in the Kurdish regions in recent months.

On 5 May KHRP Deputy Director Rachel Bernu travelled to Ankara, Turkey to meet with the Delegation of the European Commission to Turkey. Over the next two days she also met with representatives of the Dutch, Norwegian, Irish, Danish, British, Belgian, Swedish and American embassies. The purpose of the meetings was

Excavations Begin in Search for Remains of Relative of KHRP Applicant

The Turkish authorities have begun excavations in the Kurdish regions of Turkey in a search for the remains of two people who went missing during the conflict there in the mid-1990s, one of whom was at the heart of a case filed at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) with KHRP assistance in 2002.

The search for the remains of Fethi Yıldırım and Hakkı Kaya in the Hani district of Diyarbakır began in response to information supplied by Abdülkadir Aygan, a former member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) turned state informant whose confessions have formed a large part of investigations into the conflict's many unsolved murders.

Fethi Yıldırım, a farmer who had been involved with pro-Kurdish political parties, disappeared after being detained in 1994. KHRP assisted his brother, Süleyman Yıldırım, in filing an application to the ECtHR claiming violations of the right to life, the prohibition of torture, the right to liberty and security, and the right to a fair trial, amongst others. At the time, the case was declared inadmissible.

Hakkı Kaya, the second individual mentioned in Aygan's testimony, was detained along with two friends in 1996. Though his two friends were eventually released, Kaya was never seen again. Digging at the site where he is thought to have been buried was reported to have uncovered hundreds of bone fragments and the remains of clothing.

Two individuals were reportedly taken into custody in Diyarbakır province in connection with the excavations. Abdülhakim Güven and Hıdır Altuk, both of them said to be PKK informants, were apparently accused of involvement in unsolved murders.

'There is a real need in Turkey to confront the systematic human rights violations that characterised the height of the conflict in the Kurdish regions and to begin the process of securing justice for the relatives of all those who were "disappeared"', said KHRP Executive Director Kerim Yıldız. 'It is regrettable that Abdülkadir Aygan's evidence was not taken more seriously years ago – delays in cases such as this open the way for the possibility of evidence being tampered with. We hope that these latest excavations will be a step towards identifying those responsible in these particular cases and holding them to account.'

There has been a new impetus to investigate suspected mass graves in southeast Turkey after prosecutors ordered excavations in February in response to requests from relatives of dozens of missing Kurds.

KHRP Writes to Turkish Justice Minister Over Prison Hunger Strike



KHRP representatives Walter Jayawardene and Nicholas Stewart with members of TUAD-DER (Prisoners' Families Association) during a fact-finding mission to investigate prisoners rights in Turkey in December 2008.

KHRP wrote to the then Turkish Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Şahin in April expressing grave concern at a hunger strike in Erzurum H-Type Prison in the south-east of the country and calling for protection of prisoners' rights in line with international standards.

According to KHRP's partner organisation in Turkey, *İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Human Rights Association, İHD), the prisoners began their protest on 23 February 2009 in an effort to highlight abuses including threats and ill-treatment by prison officials, lack of access to legal aid, a prohibition on use of Kurdish in communications with family members, restrictions on access to publications in languages other than Turkish, and a lack of opportunities to mix with prisoners other than their cell-mates.

KHRP's letter expressed alarm that after weeks without food, the prisoners faced serious risk of permanent injury or even death. The letter also pointed out that the prisoners' demands invoked basic rights that the Turkish state is obliged to uphold as a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and as a member of the Council of Europe.

This incident is reflective of wider patterns of abuse within the Turkish prison system, as was revealed by a KHRP fact-finding mission which travelled to Turkey in December 2008. Concerns highlighted by the mission included routine ill-treatment, arbitrary punishments without adequate recourse to appeal, arbitrary restrictions on visiting and language rights, overcrowding and the high proportion of inmates in the system who are still awaiting trial. The overarching problem identified by the mission was a lack of proper accountability and independent oversight within the prison system.

Dispatches

to brief them on the latest human rights situation in the Kurdish regions of Turkey and KHRP's recent and forthcoming work. Rachel was in Turkey to take part in a training seminar and fact-finding mission in the south-east of the country, both of which are reported on in more detail elsewhere in this edition of Newline.

On 14 May Executive Director Kerim Yıldız met with Muharrem Erbey, Chairperson of the Diyarbakır branch of KHRP partner *İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Human Rights Association, İHD). Mr Erbey is also the Vice President of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey. A well-respected lawyer, he is currently acting for the defence in high-profile court cases against Kurdish politician Leyla Zana and Diyarbakır Mayor Osman Baydemir. Kerim and Mr Erbey discussed their concerns regarding the human rights situation in Turkey, as well as Mr Erbey's involvement in representing hundreds of Kurdish political activists who have been detained since local elections in March and the assistance that he is providing to children jailed for taking part in political demonstrations. Mr Erbey also visited the KHRP office in London to brief staff and interns on the latest human rights situation in the Kurdish regions of Turkey.

In late May, during a trip to New York, Kerim held meetings with a number of US policy makers and governmental and non-governmental organisations in order to discuss and promote work that KHRP is currently undertaking in the Kurdish regions.

Following his trip to the United States, Kerim was interviewed by Dakhil Elias, a journalist for Voice of America, on 31 May about his thoughts on the recently published Amnesty International report *The State of the World's Human Rights* and its findings in relation to the human rights situation in Turkey. The report noted that there had been no improvements in the human rights situation in Turkey over the past year, in line with KHRP's own observations.

Back in March, KHRP Turkey and Iraq Desk Officer Mustafa Gündoğdu was also quoted on the website of the international news channel France24, in an article about efforts to court Kurdish voters in the run-up to local elections in Turkey. Mustafa spoke about the decision of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to use Kurdish in his campaigning, while Kurdish politicians are banned from speaking in their own language, and recent calls from the opposition Republican People's Party for the Kurdish new year to be declared a public holiday.

Free copies of publications may be accessed and downloaded on KHRP's website (www.khrp.org). Printed copies are available for £10.00 + P&P through our brand new online shop.

Impact Report 2008



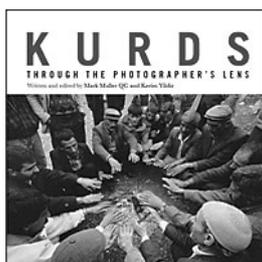
In addition to providing an overview of the human rights situation in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Caucasus, this annual publication details KHRP's activities throughout the year, including our human rights litigation and advocacy, training and fellowship programmes, fact-finding missions and trial observations, research and publications, and public awareness campaigns and communication strategies.

The report also reviews the impact of KHRP's work in 2008 in promoting greater protection of human rights in the Kurdish regions, with a particular focus on political and judicial systems, torture and ill-treatment, freedom of expression and association, cultural and linguistic rights, environmental justice, gender equality, the right to life, and war and instability.

The report should be viewed as a primary resource for anyone interested in the human rights situation in the Kurdish regions.

Kurds: Through the Photographer's Lens

ISBN 978-1-904563-86-0



A unique collection of photographs, poetry and writing commissioned by the Delfina Foundation to mark 15 years of the Kurdish Human

Rights Project, this book represents an initiative to present a vivid visual history of the life and times of the Kurds over the past decade and a half. It brings together the work of some of the most prominent photojournalists and photographers who have worked across the Kurdish regions in that period – including Susan Meiselas, Jan Grarup, Ed Kashi, and Patrick Robert – with the writings of Noam Chomsky, Harold Pinter, Jon Snow and poet Choman Hardi.

Legal Review 15

ISSN1748-0639



Legal Review 15 covers the period from January to June 2009 and features news and updates relevant to the Kurdish regions, as well as summaries and analysis of relevant decisions of international, UK and US Courts. Articles in this edition tackle subjects such as protection of the right to family life under European law in cases of migrants expelled from their host countries, the concept of the rule of law, structural violence against women in Kurdistan, Iraq, and freedom of expression in Armenia in the wake of a landmark ruling in 2008 in the KHRP-assisted case of Meltex Ltd and Mesrop Movsesyan v. Armenia before the European Court of Human Rights.

Legal Review is the only existing legal journal covering legislation and policy pertinent to the Kurdish regions and is essential reading

for those interested in legal developments in relation to Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and the Caucasus.

Closed Ranks: Transparency and Accountability in Turkey's Prison System

ISBN 978-1-905592-23-4

This report is based on the findings of a mission dispatched to Turkey by KHRP from 15 to 19 December 2008 following reports by media and regional partners of increased violations of prisoners' rights. The mission travelled to İstanbul, Ankara, Mardin and Diyarbakır, interviewing former prisoners, prisoners' families, NGOs, human rights advocates and lawyers. Meetings were also requested with officials involved in the detention system but these were all either refused or cancelled at the last minute. Concerns highlighted by the mission included routine ill treatment, arbitrary punishments without adequate recourse to appeal, arbitrary restrictions on visiting and language rights, overcrowding and the high proportion of inmates in the system who are still awaiting trial. The overarching problem identified was a lack of proper accountability and independent oversight within the prison system. The report places these findings in the context of Turkey's international human rights obligations and offers concrete recommendations for improving protection of prisoners' rights.



Fourth International Conference on the EU, Turkey and the Kurds, European Parliament, Brussels, 3rd – 4th December 2007

ISBN 978-1-905592-22-7



This report covers the key proceedings of the fourth in a series of annual conferences organised by the EU-Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC),

which took place at the European Parliament in Brussels from 3 to 4 December 2007. Themed 'Time for Change', the event was hosted by the founders of the EUTCC, namely the Bar Human Rights Committee, the Kurdish Human Rights Project, medico international and the Thorolf Rafto Foundation for Human Rights, and was supported by members of the European Parliament. Topics addressed in the course of the conference included the progress of democratisation and legislative reform in Turkey, and the prospects for dialogue and conflict-resolution. The report includes the full texts of the speeches and final resolutions, as well as a background paper distributed at the conference.

Protecting Politicians or Protecting Democracy? Parliamentary Immunity and Party Closure in the Run-Up to Local Elections in Turkey

This briefing paper explores the ways in which the mechanisms available in Turkey for lifting the immunity of MPs and shutting down political parties facilitate the targeting of democratically elected politicians by unelected officials whose conception of what is best

for the country is grounded in a narrow, secular and ethnically-exclusive form of nationalism.

This is an updated version of a paper originally published by KHRP in July 2008, just prior to the final decision of the Constitutional Court on moves to shut down the ruling Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP). It features a detailed exploration of that case and ongoing parallel proceedings against the pro-Kurdish Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party, DTP). It also includes analysis of the concept of parliamentary immunity and its application in different parts of the world, the historical context of the cases against the DTP and AKP, and the implications of these cases for democracy and human rights in Turkey.

The updated version of the paper covers moves against MPs and political parties that were ongoing in the months leading up to the March 2009 elections.

UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Trial Observation Report on Death in Custody Case

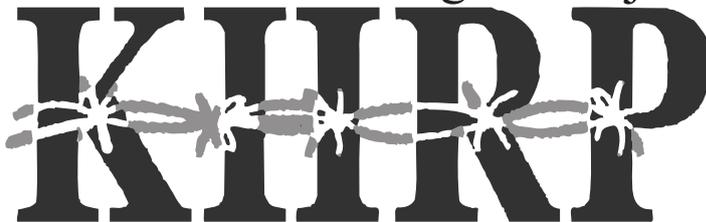
This report will set out the findings of a mission dispatched to Turkey by KHRP from 2 to 4 March 2009 to monitor trial proceedings against 60 state officials charged in connection with the alleged torture and beatings of activist Engin Çeber, who died in custody in October 2008. Following Çeber's death, Turkish Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Şahin issued a rare apology to his family. Besides attending the court proceedings, the agenda for the mission also included meetings with human rights defenders, lawyers, family of Engin Çeber and others who were arrested at the same time as him in order to build

a picture of the context surrounding this high-profile case. The report places the case in the context of the domestic and international legal framework with regard to torture and ill-treatment, and draws out key themes including impunity of state officials and the role of doctors in covering up abuses in detention.

Fact-Finding Mission Report on the Human Rights Situation in the Kurdish Regions of Turkey

This report will present the findings of a KHRP mission that travelled to southeast Turkey in early May to investigate the human rights situation there, with a particular focus on women's access to justice, impunity for state agents, issues affecting the work of human rights defenders, and the human rights impact of 'high security zones'. Those interviewed by the mission during its time in the provinces of Diyarbakır, Mardin, Siirt and Şırnak included local mayors, human rights activists, lawyers and journalists. The mission found that women in the areas visited had little or no access to justice, with key obstacles including language barriers, a refusal on the part of many state officials to take their complaints seriously, bureaucratic obstacles to obtaining legal aid, and a failure to implement protective measures available under Turkish family law. The mission also heard that human rights defenders and others who voice non-violent criticism of the state face systematic harassment, and that officials accused of human rights violations are rarely prosecuted.

Kurdish Human Rights Project



Established 1992

Project Information

THE ORGANISATION

The KHRP is a non-political, independent human rights organisation, founded in December 1992 and based in London. Its founding members include human rights lawyers, barristers, academics and doctors.

The Project is registered as a company limited by guarantee (company number 2922108) and is also a registered charity (charity number 1037236).

The KHRP is committed to the protection of the human rights of all persons within the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, irrespective of race, religion, sex, political persuasion or other belief or opinion.

Aims

- To promote awareness of the situation of Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.
- To bring an end to the violation of the rights of the Kurds in these countries.
- To promote the protection of the human rights of the Kurdish people everywhere.

Methods

- Monitoring legislation, including emergency legislation, and its application.
- Conducting

investigations and producing reports on the human rights situation of the Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere by sending trial observers and fact-finding missions.

- Using reports to promote awareness of the plight of the Kurds on the part of the committees established under human rights treaties to monitor the compliance of states.
- Using the reports to promote awareness of the plight of the Kurds on the part of the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the national parliamentary bodies and inter-governmental organisations including the United Nations.
- Liaising with other independent human rights organisations working in the same field, and co-operating with lawyers, journalists and others concerned with human rights.
- Offering assistance to indigenous human rights groups and lawyers in the form of advice, training and seminars in international human rights mechanisms.
- Assisting individuals in the bringing of human rights cases before the European Court of Human Rights.

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Calendar Of Events

June

- KHRP to attend seminar organised by the Western Kurdistan Association in London to mark fourth anniversary of the abduction and killing of Kurdish cleric Sheikh Muhammed Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi in Syria (12 June)
- KHRP Advisory Group member Professor Bill Bowring speaking at 'Security, Freedom of Expression and the Right to Dissent: Anti-Terror Legislation in Turkey, the UK and the EU' at The College of Law, London (17 June)
- KHRP Legal Team Meeting (24 June)
- KHRP fact-finding mission to Kurdistan, Iraq (late June)

July

- KHRP Board meeting (July)
- Training in Armenia on implementation of European Court of Human Rights Judgments (13 to 15 July)
- KHRP to make submission to CEDAW (27 July)
- KHRP trainings in Kurdistan, Iraq (July to September)