

The Day of the Endangered Lawyer celebrates the independence of the legal profession and promotes solidarity with lawyers globally who continue to perform their professional duties under enormous pressure and external interference. This year, the focus is on the legal profession in Turkey.

We express our alarm about the increasing attacks against members of the legal profession, the breakdown of the rule of law, and the human rights violations against lawyers, judges, and prosecutors in Turkey. On this day of the endangered lawyer, we join in support of our colleagues in Turkey.

The independence of the legal profession is an essential guarantee for the rule of law and the protection of human rights of all citizens. The independence of judges, prosecutors, and lawyers, is protected by the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, the UN Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors, and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

Prior and after the failed coup of 2016, the legal profession in Turkey has been the target of systematic persecution and attacks, which include: arbitrary arrests, detainment, interrogation, and prosecutions. Since 2016 to date, we estimate that more than 593 lawyers have been arrested, 1,546 prosecuted and 196 lawyers convicted.

These attacks against the legal profession affect the whole population in Turkey. Lawyers are not able to communicate in private with their clients, which violates the principle of legal professional privilege and the confidentiality between lawyers and their clients. Citizens are sometimes unable to obtain legal representation because lawyers refrain from taking on cases for fear of reprisals against them. This severely restricts access to justice and erodes the rule of law in Turkey.

This escalation in the targeting of lawyers goes hand in hand with legislative reforms, adopted during and after the state of emergency, which have permanently curtailed the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary and the legal profession in Turkey.

These legal reforms granted the Turkish government new powers to interfere with the work carried out by the judiciary and the prosecution services, including the power to dismiss judges, prosecutors and court officials; to control appointments to key judicial positions and other institutions; and to arrest and prosecute thousands of lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and court officials.

In these challenging times for the legal profession, we join efforts to support our Turkish colleagues and to address these threats and violations of human rights.