

Public meeting: "Lawyers on Trial in Turkey: Implications for Establishing Peace and Justice"

Thursday, 28 February, 6.30-8pm; Wilson Room, Portcullis House, Westminster, SW1:

To be a lawyer in modern Turkey is to enter an increasingly high risk profession. Many human rights lawyers in Turkey now languish in jail following repeated raids by anti-terror police and special operations squads on the offices of political activists and the arrest of lawyers for representing their clients.

IMPORTANT Please try and arrive at 6pm to make sure you leave enough time to get through security

Hosted by Siobhain McDonagh MP

Speakers: *Michael Mansfield QC, President of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers*

Prof Bill Bowring, President of the European Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights (ELDH)

Melanie Gingell, barrister Took's Chambers and member of the Bar Human Rights Committee: observed hearings in Turkey on 6 November 2012 and 3 January 2013

Margaret Owen OBE, barrister and member of the Bar Human Rights Committee: observed hearings in Turkey on 16 July 2012 and 6 November 2012

Chaired by Ali Has, Solicitor Advocate

Not only lawyers are now facing repression, but the whole of Kurdish civil society, including journalists, academics, artists and elected politicians of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), making normal public life impossible in Turkey today.

The continuing mass arrests and mass trials of lawyers are a stain on the entire Turkish society and undermines the credibility of the political system as a whole. They call into question Turkey's claim to be an open democratic state governed by the rule of law and where the legal system is free of political interference.

The root of the problem lies in the country's anti-terrorism law whose sweeping definition of what constitutes a terrorist suspect has led to lawyers being criminalised for going about what are their normal professional duties. It is a truly nightmarish situation where lawyers can face prosecution simply for representing their clients. They have been criminalised for alleged links with banned terrorist groups and have become suspect though guilt by association as they have sought to carry out their duties to their clients who are deemed to be terrorist suspects by the state.

At the present time hopes of political breakthrough in the search for a solution to the Kurdish conflict have been growing as Turkish leaders seem ready to enter into serious talks with Kurdish leaders, a development that would have been totally unthinkable only a few months ago. Nevertheless it is hard to see how these talks can ever succeed while Turkey is intent on

criminalising great swathes of its population including leading members of its legal profession.

It is feared that normal democratic politics will never take lasting root in Turkey until the government reforms its draconian anti-terrorism laws which ensure that a climate of fear dominates political life and the entire culture.

Peace in Kurdistan Campaign supported by the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, European Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights (ELDH) and CAMPACC