

Turkey must lift state of emergency restrictions for credible elections to take place

GENEVA (9 May 2018) – Protracted restrictions on the human rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association are incompatible with the conduct of a credible electoral process in Turkey, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said Wednesday, stressing that these rights are particularly crucial in the context of elections.

On 19 April, a day after the Government of Turkey called for early parliamentary and presidential elections, it announced that it would renew the state of emergency for the seventh time, suspending its obligations under several articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including articles 19, 21, 22 and 25. These articles relate directly to the freedoms of expression, assembly, association and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs.

“Over the past two years, through successive states of emergency, the space for dissent in Turkey has shrunk considerably, with at least 29 more journalists jailed on terrorism offences in just the last week of April alone,” High Commissioner Zeid said. “The heavy police presence and arrests during the May Day protests also demonstrated yet again the severely limited space for freedom of peaceful assembly in the country.”

“It is difficult to imagine how credible elections can be held in an environment where dissenting views and challenges to the ruling party are penalized so severely.”

The High Commissioner called on the Government of Turkey to immediately lift the state of emergency to enable all of its citizens to participate fully and equally in the conduct of public affairs, and to exercise their rights to vote and to stand for election without unreasonable restrictions.

In a recent report on the situation of human rights in Turkey, the UN Human Rights Office expressed concerns that routine renewals of the state of emergency and the extensive use of emergency decrees had led to an erosion of the ability of civil society, the judiciary and the media to serve their essential watchdog roles in the country.*

“Elections held in an environment where democratic freedoms and the rule of law are compromised would raise questions about their legitimacy, and result in more uncertainty and instability,” Zeid said. “It is in the interests of the people of Turkey that the country’s constitutional order is fully restored, and that human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully respected, in law and practice.”

ENDS

For the UN Human Rights Office's March 2018 report on Turkey, please see: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/TR/2018-03-19_Second_OHCHR_Turkey_Report.pdf

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*2018 is the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are urging people everywhere to **Stand Up for Human Rights**: www.standup4humanrights.org.*

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