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TURKISH JOURNALIST AHMET ALTAN'S ARBITRARY IMPRISONMENT AND CALL FOR HIS RELEASE

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Ahmet H Altan is an acclaimed Turkish novelist with more than ten published books, columnist, journalist, editor-in-chief of a newspaper, and avid defender of democracy, civil rights and freedom of speech for all layers of the society. He was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole with the accusation of being a member of a terrorist organization, attempting to overthrow the government and the constitutional order, interfering with the work of the government and the national assembly. Turkish Supreme Court overturned the decision on him in January, 2019. However, the court denied Ahmet Altan's petition for release. He was also convicted for insulting the president later in 2019.

Ahmet Altan had spent his career of more than 30 years by dissecting the visible and hidden fault lines threatening democracy and civil rights in Turkey. Throughout his career, Altan has always been subject to attacks and praises for lauding democracy, human rights, and civil liberties for all. He was sentenced to prison for 20 months in 1995 for defending the rights of Kurdish citizens -his sentencing was later delayed on the condition of not repeating the same "crime". He published documents obtained from military and bureaucratic sources much like "*Pentagon Papers*" and "*Watergate scandal*". His leadership in enabling investigative journalism in Turkey and his stance on many subjects made him the recipient of more than 100 lawsuits instead of journalism awards. His stand-off with military and government and his principled defense of minorities remind us the likes of *Ben Bradlee of The Washington Post* (Watergate, Pentagon Papers) and *Ralph McGill of Atlanta Constitution* (Defending anti-segregation in Jim Crow era Georgia).

In December 2013, a graft probe by the prosecutors against five ministers and their sons as well as the son of the prime minister of the time, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was abruptly nipped in the bud by Erdogan. Altan's defense

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of and emphasis on the justice system in a three-legged democratic system ruffled a lot of feathers and brought him the wrath of the government right after the [failed coup attempt](#) on July 15, 2016. Shortly after, he was detained and arrested. Though he was released on probation, his pseudo-freedom lasted only 24 hours. Upon leaving the courtroom, Ahmet spoke to the press, saying “*This country is ours, we are not afraid. We’ll always defend law and democracy*”. During the trial, the prosecutors even claimed that he used his TV appearance the day before the coup attempt to give “*subliminal messages*” in support of the coup. He also shared the records of his experience during trial with his lawyer to be made public for future generations. His notes were published and translated to English with the name **“I WILL NEVER SEE THE WORLD AGAIN”**.

Snippets from Altan’s writings:

- “We may die or be killed, be jailed or be tried in the courts, be left unemployed, be tortured or shot, but we may never be defeated. *We are the defenders of life*”
- “How crowded is our loneliness! Wherever we turn, we bump into ourselves!”
- “Love is like a sword wound! It heals but surely leaves its mark.”
- “You can imprison me, but you cannot keep me here. Because, like all writers, I have magic, I can pass through your walls with ease.”
- “I will never see the world again; I will never see a sky unframed by the walls of a courtyard. I am descending to Hades. I walk into the darkness like a god who writes his own destiny. My hero and I disappear into the darkness together.”

Today, we urge the Turkish government to enforce the rule of law and to immediately terminate Ahmet Altan’s arbitrary imprisonment! We also call on the international community to urge the authorities in Turkey for his immediate release and Ahmet Altan’s colleagues, friends, readers to speak out!



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