

International press groups condemn journalist arrests in Turkey

PARIS, FRANCE / DARMSTADT, GERMANY: The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), together with the World Editors Forum, have condemned the arrests of dozens of journalists in Turkey as a controversial investigation into the failed 2007 Ergenekon plot to overthrow the Turkish government intensifies.



Turkish authorities claim the alleged plot called for assassinations and attacks that would have created chaos, with the ultimate aim of inciting the military to launch a coup d'état. The investigation has accused hundreds of politicians, retired military officers, academics and journalists of conspiring to bring down the government.

The latest wave of arrests came after police raided the homes of 10 journalists and writers, amongst them Ahmet Sik and Nedim Sener, prominent author and investigative reporter for *Milliyet* daily newspaper. They were initially accused of "inciting hatred and animosity among the public," charges later defined as "being member[s] of the Ergenekon organisation."

According to reports, the latest arrests bring to 63 the number of journalists under arrest in Turkey, many of whom have been charged in connection with the Ergenekon investigation.

A series of demonstrations were held in Istanbul and Ankara over the weekend in support of the detained journalists that highlighted the deteriorating environment for freedom of the press in Turkey.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's calls for the media "to act responsibly" in their response to the recent raids was met with little sympathy amongst the demonstrators, with the Freedom for Journalists Platform - an umbrella group representing local and national media organisations in Turkey - responding and claiming that the Prime Minister's ruling party bore much of the responsibility "for creating a climate of pressure and fear in the country."

WAN-IFRA has written to Prime Minister Erdogan to express its concern at the targeting of journalists for simply doing their jobs, calling on him "to ensure that Sik, Sener and all others held for exercising their right to freedom of expression are immediately released and that all charges against them are dropped."

The full letter can be read at tinyurl.com/4lbdjlr and more on WAN-IFRA's press freedom campaigns can be found at

www.wan-ifra.org/microsites/press-freedom.