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His Excellency
Esat Şafak Göktürk
Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey
Embassy of Turkey in Oslo
Halvdan Svartes Gate 5
N-0244 Oslo, Norway

Oslo, 23 November 2016

Re: Demand to Free Cumhuriyet Journalists

Your Excellency:

On behalf of the International Press Institute (IPI) – a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists dedicated to protecting media freedom – we write to urge your government to end its crackdown on independent media in Turkey.

Since the July 15 coup attempt, we have observed a number of troubling developments that appear unrelated, and in some cases counter, to legitimate efforts to bring those responsible to justice, such as closures of media outlets and the imprisonment of nearly 140 journalists.

We are especially concerned by actions against Cumhuriyet, particularly the detentions of Kadri Gürsel, Murat Sabuncu and others. We have seen no evidence that they supported terrorism and can only conclude that they are being punished for criticising the government.

Journalism and media freedom – in contributing to government accountability, and to an open, transparent and more equal society – is essential for stability. We fear that as respect for democracy and human rights declines in Turkey, and as only pro-government voices are allowed to be heard, instability will only grow and spread beyond Turkey's borders.

Turkey has a valid interest in combating those who take up arms against it. But the state of emergency has been abused to settle scores, consolidate power and crush dissent; actions both illegitimate and wholly inconsistent with protecting democracy.

The world requires Turkey's cooperation to address serious challenges, including the flow of migrants to Europe and the fight against radical militants. But if Turkey continues to slide into authoritarianism, those challenges will intensify, with potentially catastrophic results.

We therefore urge your government to restore respect for democracy and human rights and to end the abuse of emergency powers. We also call for the immediate release of Mr. Gürsel, Mr. Sabuncu and their Cumhuriyet colleagues – as well as all other journalists held in connection with their work – and for all charges against them to be dropped.

To that end, and given IPI's over-65 years of expertise on media freedom issues, we would be happy to meet with you to provide any further information on this matter.

Yours very truly,

Ole Kristian Bjellaanes,
IPI Executive Board Member
Chair, IPI National Committee in Norway
Managing Editor, Norwegian News Agency