To the members of the Executive Board of the European Network Against Racism,

We kindly would like to raise an issue concerning the escalating violence and its discriminatory consequences in Turkey for your consideration. As the Association for Monitoring Equal Rights (AMER), a member of your network since October 2015, we have been monitoring the measures taken in the armed conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdish insurgency group PKK from a rights-based perspective. We are gravely concerned about several aspects of the situation, and therefore we have decided to inquire whether we can reinforce our collaboration with you to combat the human rights abuses and racist sentiment resulting from the current conflict. Given the exhaustion of national mechanisms available to address this situation, and the increasing urgency of human rights violations, we regard European and international cooperation as one of the main (and perhaps only) resources available at this time of emergency. Below, we briefly introduce the situation, and present you with our requests from ENAR.

The conflict related to the Kurdish Issue restarted in Turkey 9 months ago. The negotiation process that had been continuing since March 2013 has been ceased, and the conflict resumed in July 2015. The Turkish government announced that they had initiated the application of a “counter-terror” policy. Accordingly, it has been conducting military operations in the Kurdish cities (in the East and Southeast of Turkey) since July 2015.

At the beginning of August, “Temporary Special Security Zones” were established in rural areas, and later spread into urban areas. [[1]](#footnote-1) Temporary Special Security Zones are prohibited areas where operations are expected to be conducted. Civilians are ordered or intimidated to evacuate these zones, prohibiting their access to agricultural lands, gardens, and livestock breeding areas. This measure caused the forced migration of the inhabitants of these regions into urban cities.

Afterwards, curfews were put in place in 19 provinces of 7 cities, totaling 59 times. Curfews were administrative decisions made by city governors. In the operations conducted in provinces where curfews were put in place[[2]](#footnote-2), many rights (including the right to life) were violated. These operations still continue in the Sur province of Diyarbakır, and İdil and Cizre provinces of Şırnak.

The curfews and military operations in the Sur province of Diyarbakır has been continuing for 82 days, in the Cizre province of Şırnak for 72 days, and in the İdil province of Şırnak for 6

days. Residential areas in town centers are being bombed by military tanks, and heavy weaponry are being used in houses and workplaces, causing severe damage. Some members of law enforcement and military write racist slogans on the walls where the operations are being conducted[[3]](#footnote-3), security vehicles are broadcasting music associated with racist groups, and hate speech directed at ethnic populations are being published on the traditional and social media. Following such incidents, no efficient and effective investigation is conducted towards members of law enforcement and military officials.

In addition to the racist and discriminatory actions of the law enforcement, racist speech and mob violence incidents increased throughout Turkey. Especially between September 7th and September 9th, racist acts of violence were committed by masses in the city of Kırşehir, the Beypazarı province of Ankara, and Edremit province of Balıkesir.

Close to 200.000 people were forced to leave their homes in provinces with curfews. The government does not implement the principles stated on the UN Guiding Principles on Displacement, hence not fulfilling their responsibilities towards their own citizens and the international community.

Since the start of the operations conducted by security forces until February 6th, 224 civilians lost their lives in areas where curfews were put in place. At least 42 of those were children.

The appeals and applications related to human rights violations were denied by national courts and the Turkish Constitutional Court. The European Court of Human Rights has released injunctions on the cases of 5 injured civilians regarding their right to life, ordering the government to take all necessary precautions. Only one of those injunctions was enacted. Due to inaction from the government regarding the other injunctions, three civilians died. The condition of the fifth civilian is unknown.

The corpses of the civilians who lost their lives are being held on streets, and the civilian population is not allowed to claim the bodies.

In the province of Cizre, 3 basements containing 170 people including injured civilians were bombed. Official and local sources provide different information regarding the number of people who lost their lives in these three buildings. As of today, it is estimated that there are 30 identified and 138 unidentified bodies in different hospitals in Cizre. When these numbers are added to the recorded civilian deaths, the total number of deceased civilians is estimated to exceed 300 people. We fear this number will exponentially increase, and more rights will be violated if no drastic action is taken.

The latest development occurred today, on the 22nd of February, when the Turkish EU Minister Volkan Bozkır responded to a statement by the European Parliament’s rapporteur on Turkey Kati Piri. Ms. Piri visited Diyarbakır to gather data for the Turkish accession report last week, and reported on the violations of right to life and right to health by the Turkish forces. As a response to an objective rights-oriented account of the situation in the region, Mr. Bozkır questioned Ms. Piri’s impartiality, based on the fact she did not call PKK a terrorist organization, and threatened that the Turkish government would cease to see her as a legitimate contact if she insisted on approaching the issue in this way. We believe that this portrays the determination of the Turkish government to portray the issue as rightful counter-terrorism and to disregard all calls and statements asking the government to respect the human rights of the civilians living in the area while conducting operations.

At a time when the conflict has polarized the country to a maximum extent, we are concerned about the wellbeing of Kurdish citizens, not only in the Southeast region, but throughout Turkey. At the moment, calling for peace is being equated with supporting terrorism, and the Kurdish ethnicity is being equated with terrorists. You can imagine the environment of intolerance promoting hateful actions that this would lead to.

As a result, we have four requests from ENAR:

1 – To pay closer attention to the escalating human rights crisis in Turkey, and prioritize advocacy activities that highlight the situation in its agenda.

2 – For ENAR Executive Board to write a formal letter to the government of Turkey, stressing the necessity of respecting human rights during times of conflict.

3 – To prepare an information note with AMER on the situation in Turkey that would be endorsed by ENAR, and share it with European civil society organizations and the European Parliament members as well as the relevant Commission directorate.

4 – To make a call to ENAR member CSOs to conduct lobbying and advocacy to their national governments to increase the pressure on the Turkish government to cease human rights violations during times of conflict.

We appreciate your consideration of our requests. We would be more than willing to provide you with any evidence that you may deem necessary to evaluate. We sincerely hope that you could support us in our attempt to protect the rights of our fellow citizens and the rule of law in Turkey.

Sincerely,

Association for Monitoring Equal Rights

1. See: Appendix 1, Appendix 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See: Appendix 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See: Appendix 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)