

# Society of Editors

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*From the Director*

Rt Hon Theresa May MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
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CC: Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

10 May 2018

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you ahead of your reported meeting on Tuesday with President Erdogan of Turkey. The Society, which campaigns for a free press, freedom of expression and high editorial standards along with the public's right to know, was heartened to note ahead of this week's debate on the Data Protection Bill, your support for a free press as an essential element of a free, democratic society. In light of your support for a free press, we would be grateful if you would consider using your meeting with Mr Erdogan to raise with him the very real concerns that have been reported on the state of press freedom in Turkey.

As you will be aware, following the attempted coup of 2016, more than 180 news outlets have been shut down in Turkey and the most recent figures documented by the Stockholm Center for Freedom show 259 journalists and media workers in jail as of April 21, 2018. After more than a year in provisional detention, dozens of journalists have now begun to be tried for alleged complicity in the July 2016 coup attempt with the first sentences to be handed down in recent weeks including life imprisonment.

The decision to sentence such prominent journalists as Ahmet Altan and Mehmet Altan to life in prison is deeply disturbing. Not only have the brothers lost their jobs and their livelihoods, they now face life in prison on charges that are dubious and appear to be seriously lacking in evidence. The conviction of Mehmet Altan is even more worrying as it defies an order by Turkey's highest court to release him after it was found earlier this year that his imprisonment had violated his constitutional rights. The difficulties facing freedom of expression in Turkey are huge and the situation is deeply concerning.

Turkey remains the biggest jailer of journalists in the world and it has once again fallen in this year's Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index. According to the report, there are legitimate concerns as to the legal recourse open to detained journalists and censorship remains rife. As detailed in the report, 'a state of

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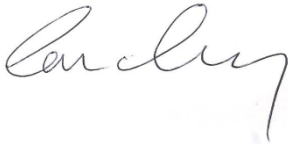
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## *From the Director*

emergency has allowed the authorities to eliminate dozens of media outlets with the stroke of a pen, reducing pluralism to a handful of low-circulated and targeted publications.'

The deterioration of media freedom and the use of emergency powers to jail journalists in Turkey is deeply worrying at a time when the country requires a free press more than ever. The Society urges you, during your dialogue with President Erdogan, to raise these concerns and to remind him that journalism is not a crime nor should it be treated as such. It is hoped that the Turkish authorities will take steps to immediately release all those held in prison for exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression and that independent news organisations will be given the freedom to report without fear of intimidation or persecution.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Murray  
Executive Director  
Society of Editors

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