Adoption of the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Turkey
Item 6 - 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council
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It is disappointing to observe the Turkish government’s refusal, during its UPR, to acknowledge key issues that are at the core of the human rights crisis the country is facing today. If the Turkish government was serious about its engagement with the UPR process, it would commit to address the increasing erosion of judicial independence and abusive use of criminal proceedings and detention to target perceived government critics and opponents; the increasing restrictions on free speech and media; and the systematic failure to investigate abuses committed by state officials such as torture and ill-treatment in custody.

We deeply regret that Turkey refused to accept the recommendations to introduce a constitutional amendment to make the Council of Judges and Prosecutors independent of the executive. Without this fundamental structural amendment, Turkey's justice system will remain under political control of the presidency and ruling party. The prolonged and arbitrary detention of human rights defender Osman Kavala and politician Selahattin Demirtas illustrate all too clearly the impact of political court decisions in combination with Turkey's readiness to flout the binding judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

Turkey has also signaled that it plans no further revision of its Anti-Terror Law. Under that law, and the many offences it covers in the Turkish Penal Code, tens of thousands of people in Turkey have been unjustly detained, prosecuted and convicted for exercising rights protected in the European Convention. Crimes such as “membership of a terrorist organization” should be much more tightly defined in law so that their application is restricted to those for whom there is evidence of material connection to violent acts of terrorism.

The Turkish delegation claimed to have already implemented a recommendation to ensure protection of the rights to freedom of information and expression. But this affirmation is at serious odds with the introduction in July of draconian new restrictions on social media companies. The new legislation forces companies like Twitter and Facebook to comply with Turkey’s requests to censor online content if they want to avoid bandwidth reduction and being rendered unusable. We urge Turkey to repeal the new law without delay to honor its obligation under its own laws and under international law to uphold the right to freedom of expression.
The human rights crisis in Turkey has deepened since its previous UPR in 2015. The government's responses to recommendations made during this cycle raise serious concerns about its willingness to engage with the strong aspiration of so many of its citizens to democracy and human rights.