

To the press and the public,

Human rights defender Fatma Yavuz has been subjected to smear and lynching campaigns in both the media and social media. We stand by Fatma Yavuz, who has been dangerously targeted. We call on state institutions and officials to condemn such acts, take measures against similar acts and take the necessary steps to protect Yavuz.

Fatma Yavuz worked as a Koran Course teacher at the Directorate of Religious Affairs for 14 years. In 2019, she was dismissed from her job following an investigation on the grounds that she did not comply with the provision found in the Presidency of Religious Affairs' Regulation stating that employees should be "known in their environment as persons upholding Islam, its creed, worship practices and morality".

Fatma Yavuz, with her identity as a human rights defender blended with her ethnic and religious identity, has a unique place in efforts to defend the protection of everyone's human rights in Turkey. For this reason, she is frequently faced with hate speech and threats. Yavuz, who works at the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Faith Desk, has been increasingly subjected to smear and lynching campaigns in both the media and social media in recent days.

What Fatma Yavuz experiences is not new. There are many human rights defenders who feel uneasy, who are attacked and even killed because they are targeted.

However, states are under the obligation to protect human rights defenders. As emphasized in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Guidelines for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders:

State institutions and officials must refrain from any acts of intimidation or reprisals by threats, damage and destruction of property, physical attacks, torture, and other ill-treatment, killing, enforced disappearance or other physical or psycho- logical harm targeting human rights defenders and their families. Participating States also have a duty to protect human rights defenders from such acts by non- state actors and to take steps to prevent abuses. Public authorities should publicly condemn such acts and apply a policy of zero tolerance.¹

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders calls upon states:

... to exercise due diligence in preventing violations and abuses against human rights defenders, including through practical steps to prevent threats, harassment and violence against women human rights defenders, who face particular risks, and in combating impunity by ensuring that those responsible for violations and abuses, including gender-based violence and threats against women human rights defenders, committed by State and non-State actors, including online, are promptly brought to justice through impartial investigations.²

¹ OSCE/ODIHR, Guidelines for the Protection of Human Rights, 2014.

² United Nations, General Assembly Resolution, A/RES/68/181, 30 January 2014.

We are concerned. We condemn the lynching campaign against Fatma Yavuz. We stand by Fatma Yavuz, who has been dangerously targeted. We call on state institutions and officials to condemn such acts, take measures against similar acts and take the necessary steps to protect Yavuz.

Association for Monitoring Equal Rights

Freedom of Belief Initiative

Human Rights Agenda Association

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Rights Initiative Association