



Letter to Government (Open)

February 8, 2016

Prime Minister of Turkey Ahmet Davutoğlu
Office of the Prime Minister
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Dear Prime Minister Davutoğlu,

We are writing to express our concerns about credible reports that Turkish security forces are blocking access to urgent medical care for the sick and wounded, in the course of their operations in southeastern Turkey. Specifically, we have reports of wounded civilians calling for assistance but ambulances being prevented from responding to their calls. These include reports of people in need of medical care being trapped, not just for hours, but for days.

Our concerns about the obstruction of health care are compounded by credible reports of the killing of unarmed civilians in the same region. A video published by international media outlets appears to show Turkish security forces firing on and killing unarmed civilians in Cizre in violation of international human rights law.

Such killings are unlawful and it is imperative that both civilians and others who are injured by security forces be afforded timely access to medical treatment. Extended curfews in the region have prevented people who are otherwise mobile but in need of medical care from seeking that care.

There are reports that the government is cutting the delivery of water, food, and electricity, all critical to the provision of basic health care. Restrictions on the mobility of medical and rehabilitation staff, 24-hour curfews, and the refusal to allow international monitoring of security operations are having severe consequences on the civilian population, and resulting in a failure to safeguard health services and health workers. Medical professionals must be allowed to carry out

their duty to provide care in crisis situations, and any interference, including bodily harm and restrictions on movement or supplies, is a violation of the right to health and life.

We are also deeply concerned about reports of legal action and other forms of harassment taken against academics, health professionals, and human rights activists who have called on the Turkish government to respect international human rights law.

Turkish human rights groups have reported the significant loss of civilian lives, including children, since August 2015 in regions where the government imposed official curfews. The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey also reported the deaths of civilians in areas under curfew since December 11, 2015, allegedly due to obstruction by security forces of ambulances or other transport to medical facilities.

As health professionals, our primary concern is the protection of civilians and ensuring access to medical care for the sick and wounded. The Turkish government is obligated to protect the sick and wounded from ill-treatment and to ensure adequate medical care. Turkey is obligated to ensure access to health care facilities and services for the sick and wounded, even in the midst of unrest, under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Turkey is a state party.

We urge you to do all that is necessary to ensure adequate health care to all those in need, and to ensure Turkey complies with its human rights law obligations. In particular, we urge you to:

- Remove any obstructions to accessing medical care, including, but not limited to, the indefinite curfews, interference by security forces, and failure to deliver water, food, and electricity;
- End the indefinite curfews, and ensure security operations adhere to international human rights law, in particular with regard to the use of force in policing;
- Allow access to the region for international monitors to ensure security forces are complying with international norms;
- Conduct independent investigations into allegations of excessive use of force, torture, ill-treatment, and extrajudicial killings by security forces, and, where evidence amounts to individual criminal accountability, prosecute perpetrators in a court meeting international fair trial standards; and
- End legal actions and other forms of harassment against individuals, including health professionals, speaking out in support of Turkey's obligations to respect its international human rights obligations in its military operations in the southeast.

As concerned health professionals, we call upon you, Prime Minister Davutoğlu, and the Turkish government to respect international human rights law while conducting security operations in the country's southeast, including respecting the professional duty of all medical personnel to provide medical care to those in need.

Yours sincerely,



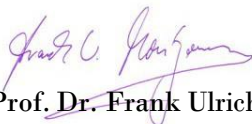
Donna McKay, Executive Director, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)



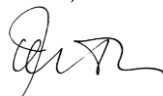
Sir Michael Marmot, President, World Medical Association (WMA)



Dr. Mark Porter, Chair, BMA Council, and Dr. John Chisholm, Chair, BMA Ethics Committee, British Medical Association (BMA)



Prof. Dr. Frank Ulrich Montgomery, President, German Medical Association (Bundesärztekammer, GMA)



Dr. Jacques de Haller, President, Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)



Asger Kjærum, Director of Advocacy, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)



Dr. Pierre Duterte, Member of Steering Committee, Independent Forensic Expert Group (IFEG)



Elizabeth Adams, Director of Professional Development, Irish Nurses and Midwifery Organisation (INMO)



Dr. Mark Reiter, President, American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM)



Dr. Adriaan van Es, Secretary, International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organizations (IFHHRO)



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