

London, 1 December 2015

STATEMENT

BHRC AND DPI DEPLORE SHOOTING OF TAHIR ELÇI, PRESIDENT OF DIYARBAKIR BAR ASSOCIATION, TURKEY

It is with great sadness that the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC) and the Democratic Progress Institute (DPI) note the fatal shooting of Tahir Elçi, President of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, in southeast Turkey on Saturday 28th November 2015.

Mr Elçi was a fearless human rights defender and consistently principled advocate for minorities across Turkey, as well as for the victims of a wide range of human rights abuses. A victim of torture himself, (see European Court of Human Rights Application No. 23145/93) Mr Elçi was instrumental in bringing cases of torture, detention and disappearances against Turkey before the domestic courts as well as the European Court of Human Rights. He was well known to the BHRC and DPI, as he was to Bar Associations across Europe, as an authoritative and calm voice in the field of human rights in Turkey.

As head of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, he had led fact-finding missions to document wide-scale, human rights abuses against the civilian population in the mainly Kurdish regions of the country where towns continue to be held under siege by state security forces, where 24 hour a day curfews have been imposed and in which there have been numerous civilian casualties.

Last month, he was subject to investigation and arrested for comments he made during a television debate in which he said that the PKK (the Kurdistan Workers' Party) was not a terrorist organisation but an armed political movement with a broad support base that had also committed some terrorist acts. Mr Elçi was subject to numerous death threats after the debate. His comments led to indictment on charges of "spreading terrorist propaganda" for which he was due to be prosecuted next year. As freedom of speech comes under increasing attack in Turkey, Mr Elçi's tireless work as a human rights defender, a lawyer and a proponent of a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Turkey was courageous and crucial.

He was killed by a single bullet to the head at the end of a press conference in a public street in Diyarbakir in which he was calling for an end to violence between the PKK and the authorities. Two police officers also died. His funeral on Sunday was attended by thousands of people in his home city of Diyarbakir. There now must be an effective investigation by the Turkish authorities leading to the prompt prosecution of those responsible for his murder, the circumstances of which remain unclear.

Our thoughts are with his wife, young family, with his friends and colleagues and all those in mourning for him across Turkey and beyond.

ENDS.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. For an interview with BHRC spokesperson, please contact Céline Grey, BHRC Project Coordinator, on +44 (0)7854 197862. For an interview with DPI spokesperson, please contact Marta Welander, DPI Deputy Director, +44 (02) 203 206 9939.
2. For more information on the Bar Human Rights Committee (BHRC), visit the website at <http://barhumanrights.org.uk> For more information on the Democratic Progress Institute (DPI), visit the website at <http://www.democraticprogress.org>
3. The Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC) is the international human rights arm of the Bar of England and Wales, working to protect the rights of advocates, judges and human rights defenders around the world. The BHRC is concerned with defending the rule of law and internationally recognised legal standards relating to human rights and the right to a fair trial. It is independent of the Bar Council.
4. The Democratic Progress Institute (DPI) is an independent non-governmental organisation, which was established in consultation with a group of international experts in the areas of conflict resolution and democratic advancement. The Institute seeks to provide expertise, combining research and practicable approaches to broaden bases for wider public involvement in promoting peace, democracy building, human rights and the rule of law.