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Turkey: do not turn back the clock on human rights

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The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, on 19 July called on Turkish authorities to respond to the attempted coup by reinforcing the protection of human rights and by strengthening democratic institutions and checks and balances.



"I deplore the loss of so many lives in Turkey over the weekend, and offer my sincere condolences to the families of those who were killed," High Commissioner Zeid said. "The Turkish people bravely took to the streets to defend their country against those who sought to undermine its democracy. I urge the Government of Turkey to respond by upholding the rule of law, by strengthening the protection of human rights and by reinforcing democratic institutions. Those responsible for the violence must be brought to justice with full respect for fair trial standards."

"In the aftermath of such a traumatic experience, it is particularly crucial to ensure that human rights are not squandered in the name of security and in the rush to punish those perceived to be responsible," he added.

High Commissioner Zeid expressed deep concern that a large number of judges and prosecutors were swiftly suspended on Saturday and detention orders were issued against many. The suspensions were particularly worrying given concerns about judicial independence in Turkey, he said.

"The independence of the judiciary and of the legal profession is key to the fair administration of justice, and judges must be able to exercise their functions without undue restrictions, pressures, threats or interference. The mass suspension or removal of judges is cause for serious alarm, and reports that many have been subject to detention orders also raises concerns of arbitrary detention," he said.

Given the large number of people who have been detained since Saturday, the High Commissioner stressed the importance of respecting the presumption of innocence, due process, and fair trial guarantees and of allowing independent observers to access places of detention. He also stressed the importance of transparency in the administration of justice.

"Turkish authorities are obliged to investigate all reports of violence, regardless of the political leanings of the alleged perpetrators," he said.

The High Commissioner also expressed deep regret that high-level officials have suggested that the death penalty may be reinstated.

"Turkey abolished the death penalty in 2004, but in fact it has not carried out capital punishment for 32 years – since 1984," High Commissioner Zeid said. "Reintroduction of the death penalty would be in breach of Turkey's obligations under international human rights law* – a big step in the wrong direction. I urge the Turkish Government to refrain from turning back the clock on human rights protections."

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