



**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2013  
Warsaw, Poland  
September 25, 2013**

**Working Session 9**

**Turkey: Uphold Freedoms of Assembly and Association in Order to Avoid Polarization**

Freedom House has been conducting a global study on freedom of assembly, including in several OSCE States. Based on a recent trip to Turkey, we would like to focus on particular concerns there.

Freedom House calls on the government of Turkey to uphold its OSCE commitments to freedom of assembly and association, and to avoid using the Gezi Park protests as a pretext for persecution of civil society and political groups. The consequences of such an approach will be further polarization, tension, and conflict within Turkish society.

In late May, protests against the proposed re-development of a large park in Istanbul's Taksim Square were violently dispersed by police officers using tear gas, water cannons, pepper spray, and clubs. The brutality of the police in the first days of the protests set off angry reactions across Turkey and led directly to an outpouring of anger against the government. Millions of people across Turkey representing a variety of causes and political positions joined the protests.

Our concern that these events may be used to persecute the Turkish government's political opponents has been aggravated by the government's recent actions. On Friday, September 23, the pro-government newspaper Star reported that the Interior Ministry considered illegal radical groups to be behind the Gezi Park protests. That same day, Prime Minister Erdoğan accused the leader of the main opposition party, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, of having "bloody hands" for his party's joining the protests. Government officials up to and including the Prime Minister have repeatedly characterized the protests as a conspiracy to overthrow the government. The Ministry of Health has initiated an investigation of pharmacists who provided medicine to protesters suffering from the consequences of tear gas exposure, and has proposed draft legislation criminalizing emergency medical care without authorization. Several of the initial organizers of the first Gezi Park protests, the Taksim Solidarity Platform, including those who met with the Prime Minister in person on June 14 to seek a resolution to the crisis, are now under investigation.

Neither the Ministry of Interior nor the Ministry of Justice have been able to provide exact numbers of those detained, arrested, or under investigation for the protests, but the numbers are believed to be in the thousands.

Especially in these difficult times for Turkey, when there are grave economic and regional challenges, the government must uphold freedoms of assembly and association in order to allow public expression of dissent and to protect Turkey's democratic progress.

We call on the participating States of the OSCE to monitor the adherence to these commitments and to encourage reforms to better uphold these important rights and commitments.