

January 25, 2022

FCCJ Statement– Arrest of Turkish Journalist Sedef Kabas

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan unequivocally condemns the arrest of Turkish journalist and TV presenter Sedef Kabas, who was detained this week for allegedly insulting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. She faces up to four years in jail.

Kabas' offense was to recite an old proverb during a guest appearance on television. She was taken from her home in Istanbul on Jan. 22 and later arrested. The TVchannel that hosted her was fined and the show was suspended for five weeks.

The arrest is another blow to the precarious state of freedom of expression in Turkey. The country scored 32 out of 100 points in the Freedom House 2021 democracy evaluation and was labeled "Not Free". The 2021 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index ranks it 153 out of 180 countries.

Since becoming the president in 2014, approximately 160,169 investigations have been launched over insulting Erdogan. Reuters news agency says that in 2020 alone, police filed more than 31,000 investigations related to the charge of insulting the country's leader.

In the same week as Kabas' arrest, Erdogan also indirectly threatened another famous female member of civil society, the Turkish songwriter Sezen Aksu, for allegedly insulting religious values in a 2017 song. Ironically, Erdogan himself was arrested in 1993 for reciting a religious poem. He served time in jail and won power a couple of years later partly by portraying himself as a victim of injustice.

In her first statement since being jailed, Sedef Kabas said, "The worst nightmare of organized atrocities is the solidarity, resistance and courage of the good." During her TV appearance she said: "There is a very famous proverb that says that a crowned head becomes wiser. But we see it is not true. A bull does not become king just by entering the palace, but the palace becomes a barn."

The FCCJ strongly urges the Turkish government to drop all charges against Kabas, release journalists who have been detained while doing their jobs, and reverse Turkey's alarming slide in press freedom. We join with the European courts in calling on the Turkish government to again allow free public discourse and criticism.

Freedom of the Press Committee