

## TAHİR ELÇİ CASE SHOULD NOT END UP WITH IMPUNITY

**20 October 2020**

Tahir Elçi was murdered 5 years ago. He was a human rights defender who bravely fought for human rights and peace, for which he was known as the ‘Ambassador [‘Elçi’ in Turkish] of Peace.’ From 1990s onwards, he advocated the rights of thousands of people who had been tortured, forcibly disappeared and displaced. In many cases of human rights violations, he fearlessly represented the victims before domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights, and helped them to seek justice. Over the years when he was the President of Diyarbakır Bar Association, he continued his activities in civil society as well, working closely with human rights organizations. He was also among the founding members of numerous human rights organizations in Turkey.

Following the comments, he made during a TV programme on 14 October 2015, he became a target. Later he was subjected to detention and criminal investigation, and a swiftly prepared indictment emboldened the threats against him. He started to receive death threats.

On 26 November 2015, Diyarbakır’s iconic four-legged minaret in Sur district was damaged during an armed clash between the Turkish security workers and members of the PKK. On 28 November 2015, Tahir Elçi came at the site to make a press statement in the name of Diyarbakır Bar Association. Calling for an end to the persistent violence, he said:

*“In this ancient region which has become the cradle of and home to lots of civilizations, in this common place of humanity, we don’t want any guns, clashes or operations. We demand that wars, armed conflicts, guns and operations are kept away from this place.”*

Immediately after the press statement ended, an armed clash took place in the street. Tahir Elçi was shot to death in his head with a single bullet. However, it took 5 years for the case to come before the court. In addition, many factors cast doubts on the soundness and reliability of the investigation: A crime scene investigation was not carried out for 111 days, disrupting the evidence integrity; the law enforcement officers present at the scene were only interviewed months after the incidence, although camera footage and eyewitness accounts indicate that they fired their guns, making them potentially suspect in the case; and the statements of certain public officials who might be knowledgeable about the case were never heard.

Following Tahir Elçi’s killing, an inquiry commission was formed within Diyarbakır Bar Association to ensure that an effective investigation is conducted on the case. However, as the lawyers at the commission found that their demands were not met and the investigation was almost blocked, they commissioned in 2016 the research agency Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths University of London to examine the footages. The results of the technical analysis that this institution, specialized on forensic examinations, carried out on the sounds and footage were submitted to the Prosecution of Diyarbakır at the end of 2018. As a result of this analysis which, by matching the sounds and footage that were recorded from different angles, examined how many gunshots were fired at the very time Tahir Elçi was shot and which guns they belonged to, a sound suspicion of crime were pointed against the police officers present at the scene.

The fact that criminal charges are brought against the three suspect police officers and the indictment is finally submitted to the court in March 2020 after nearly 5 years has become a starting point, albeit being late, in the way towards ensuring justice.

With his work on the unsolved assassinations, torture, violations of the right to life and impunity, Tahir Elçi was one of the invaluable human rights defenders and lawyers in Turkey. He dedicated his life to the disclosure of truth. We call for all the circumstances surrounding this killing, which deeply hurt the human rights movement in Turkey, to be fully brought into light; and all public officials who bear responsibility -whether by their acts or out of negligence- to be prosecuted in the case; and the killing of Tahir Elçi not to end up with impunity.

The killing of Tahir Elçi, who dedicated his life to the fight against impunity, should not go unpunished.

**Human Rights Joint Platform:**

Association for Monitoring Equal Rights  
Rights Initiative Association  
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Citizens Association