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## **PRESS RELEASE BY THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY WOMEN'S BRANCH CHAIRPERSON AYLİN NAZLIAKA ON THE 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION**

11.05.2021

Distinguished members of the press,

We are gathered here by virtue of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Istanbul Convention, which was unlawfully annulled by Erdoğan with a midnight decree. The Istanbul Convention, or in its full name, the "Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence", is regarded as the "gold standard" not only in Europe but also worldwide as it is the most comprehensive and binding international agreement written in its own field.

Today, the Council of Europe organized an international meeting on account of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Istanbul Convention, but Turkey was not invited to this meeting. However, 10 years ago, Turkey itself could have hosted the meeting that was organized for the Convention, which earned the country credit, and which is known by the name of one of its own cities because of being its first signatory. The decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention has not only jeopardized women's lives and impeded the fight for gender equality, but also resulted in giving up on a claim that provided the nation with "soft power" in foreign policy.

I was an MP both when the Convention was signed 10 years ago today and on 1 August 2014, when it was ratified unanimously by the parliament. That is why I remember how it was acclaimed by the ruling party representatives; a "historic moment of pride," said Erdoğan.

So, what happened since to turn that Convention, a source of pride, into an object of scorn today? What political agenda proved more valuable than the lives of women? What religious communities and cults caused the government to take the risk of opposing women? Why did the Women and Democracy Association (KADEM), which embraced the Istanbul Convention before and whose vice chair is Sümeyye Erdoğan, daughter of AKP leader Erdoğan, change direction? Was the Minister of Family and Social Services, Derya Yanık, who is also a member of KADEM, appointed to her post as a reward for this change of direction? Why did the Istanbul Convention, which AKP's Konya MP Ahmet Sorgun described as a "medicine against the disease of violence against women", later get portrayed as a kind of poison?

Distinguished members of the press,

The AKP government launched a smear campaign against the Istanbul Convention by also using the pro-government press. They are making up stories, arguing "It may as well not be enforced", "There is no need for the Istanbul Convention when we have the Law no. 6284", "We will write a domestic and national version of this agreement and it will be called the Ankara Convention". There is one thing they are not aware of: what is being annulled here is not the Convention but our right to live. Moreover, those against the Istanbul

Convention are raising their voices, saying, "Next to be annulled will be the Law no. 6284, and even the Civil Code."

We are not giving up on the Istanbul Convention, which is our lifejacket, when every day one of our sisters is being murdered by a man near her or someone she does not know at all. We will not give up! On the contrary, we will hold on to the convention even more strongly.

Today, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention, we will stand in solidarity with all women in the world through social media. Although we cannot be on the streets due to the pandemic restrictions, we have met on common feelings and thoughts and focused on defending the Istanbul Convention.

If the Convention had been enforced,

Murderers of women would not have been released so easily because of the remissions they won simply because they wore a tie or showed good behaviour.

The terms "child abuse" and "remission for good conduct" would not have been placed in the same sentence in court rulings.

It would not have been possible to force underage girls into marriage.

Ayşe Tuba Arslan, who was killed in Eskişehir by her ex-husband, against whom she had filed 23 complaints, would be among us.

In Samsun, Ayşe Cenikli, mother of two, would not have been murdered by her husband, against whom she had obtained a restraining order.

Emine Bulut, who was killed in Kırıkkale, crying "I don't want to die" in front of her child, would not have been ripped away from life.

The investigation related to Zeynep Şenpınar would not have been shut down even after she had withdrawn her complaint; and 25-year-old Zeynep, who was killed in Muğla, would still be among us today.

Arzu Koca, mother of three, who lived in Istanbul; Alev Yıldırım, 28, who lived in Tokat; and our many other sisters would have been placed under protection and would not have been murdered despite restraining orders.

According to a statement by the EŞİK (Women for Equality) Platform, composed of more than 300 women's organizations, if the Convention had been enforced since it came into effect on 1 August 2014, at least 2,336 women would be alive today. We are talking about 2,336 lives!

Distinguished members of the press,

There are some who have problems with the Istanbul Convention. For example, Article 37 of the Convention requires preventing underage marriage. This article does not work for the AKP government, who have been rehashing the underage marriage law to exonerate rapists. Let us remember what happened in 2017: It was revealed that 115 pregnant girls under 18 had been admitted to the Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Training and Research Hospital in Küçükçekmece, Istanbul, in a period of five months, but these cases had not been filed or reported to the police. 38 of those girls were under 15. After this disaster, has any legal action been taken to go through hospital records nationwide to investigate whether such a scandal had taken place in other hospitals as well? No!

Distinguished members of the press,

On 20 March, when Erdoğan arbitrarily decided to withdraw from the Convention, we declared to the public without delay that we did not recognize this decision. We repeatedly explained that international agreements duly in effect had the force of law, that only the parliament held the power to repeal laws, and parliament approval is a must for annulment. We stated that the executive cannot replace the legislative, that the President did not have the power to issue decrees over matters regarding human rights, and that this decision was a flagrant violation of the Constitution. We immediately made an appeal to the State Council for the cancellation of this rushed decision for annulment taken without receiving the opinion of women's organizations. In addition to the Women's Branch and the Parliamentary Group of our party, other political parties also lodged an appeal. Besides, bar associations and many NGOs filed lawsuits.

While we were expecting a response from the State Council, on 30 April, a second decree was published in the Official Gazette, and the annulment date was stated as 1 July. This final decision is an effort to legalize the null-and-void presidential decree with another null-and-void decision. This constitutes a pretension to give instructions to the judiciary and the Council, regarding both the lawsuits filed at the State Council and the study prepared by the Venice Commission on the decision for withdrawal.

Distinguished members of the press,

Everyone drew their own conclusions from this so-called annulment process. Murderers were relieved; six women were murdered in the first 12 hours of the day when the decree was published in the Official Gazette. After that day, many women who suffered violence and went to police stations for help were sent back to their homes by law enforcement officers. Even though women or children suffered violence, the government, as always, prioritized preserving the family and left women unprotected with a mentality that can be summarized as "What happens in the family stays in the family."

In Bolu, Cansu İrki, who suffered violence at the hands of her husband, Erdal İrki, with whom she was in an ongoing process of divorce, described to me what she went through like this: "I was beaten when I was pregnant. I was beaten after giving birth too. I called the police, but they didn't file a report. It was raining, I was under the rain, I said, 'Take me away, my baby is upstairs, please take my baby too.' Instead of getting my baby from upstairs, handing it to me and sending me to my family, the officers said, 'Come on, go upstairs, your baby is crying. Even if you go to the police station, this is where you'll come back. We can't send you away.' Then I had to go back upstairs on the insistence of the police.

A woman who approached me in Kahramankazan, Ankara, told me that she suffered violence from her husband, who had only married her with a religious ceremony, and was met with indifference by the officers in the police station.

After the announcement of the annulment, social media trolls also overstepped the mark and declared 12 April the rape day.



As violence continued claiming lives, in one social media post, Süleyman Soylu, the Minister of the Interior, presented it almost as a success that the number of women who were killed in the 34 days after the annulment was 25, while it was 34 in the 34 days before. The Turkish National Police, which retweeted this post, had to delete it upon the reaction they got on their social media account.

During AKP governments, we have seen a Minister of Family and Social Policies who commented "A one-time occurrence is of no consequence," on a case of child abuse. We have known another minister who left the responsibility to families and said, "Teach your children how to scream," instead of building a safe society for children. We have witnessed another who thought the Ministry of Family applied to their own family and created lucrative job openings for their siblings. We have even had a Minister of Family, Labour and Social Services who was so senseless as to say, "Not every femicide is the violence-against-women kind of femicide."

Over the course of the AKP government that claimed, "Zero tolerance toward violence," at least 7,500 of our sisters fell victim to murders committed by men. However, the meaningless political schemes of the government are not worth more than one woman's life. One cannot withdraw from an agreement concerning human rights by declaring divorce three times. This time, the ship will not sail that easily.

Our goal is clear: to end violence against women and enforce the Istanbul Convention. With this purpose in mind, we have decided to visit the 81 provinces of Turkey with our *YaşamHak* (Right to Life) bus. We become close witnesses of violence against women in every province and district we visit. We will put an end to this injustice. We will change this order in which women are turned away from police stations. We will keep saying, "Women are here, women are everywhere."

We will also set a genuine example of how to fight violence against women by enforcing the Istanbul Convention when we come to power. And until that time, we will stand tall against all the attacks on our rights by strongly supporting our sisters and being in solidarity with egalitarian men.

I am calling out to the one-person government from here:

The Convention could not protect women enough when it was in effect because you did not enforce it. But the absence of the Istanbul Convention will guarantee violence. If you annul it, you will be the instigators of every crime committed against women and children.

Women are not alone or powerless. We are all together on a road to an equal, fair and democratic life. As the Women's Branch of the Republican People's Party, we are making the organized struggle grow from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. We are making the undercurrent grow bigger. We know that women are bigger than one.

Revoke this wrong decision. The people impoverished, killed and burdened by your mentality will no doubt make you stop in the first elections. And women, who are peaceful and productive by nature, will lead the way.

We get our courage and strength from the people. We are shouting out on behalf of everyone defending the right to life, democracy, and equality:

**THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION WILL STAY, THE TYRANTS WILL GO AWAY!**