

# Five years on, calls continue for justice over killing of Kurdish lawyer

Author:

Sat, 2020-11-28 21:55

ANKARA: Kurdish lawyer and prominent human rights activist Tahir Elci's murder remains unsolved five years after his death amid claims that intelligence neglect may have played a part in the killing.

Elci was a key figure in Turkey's human rights movement and was also known globally for his efforts to represent human rights' violations before the European Court of Human Rights.

Nov. 28 marks the fifth anniversary of his assassination while giving a press statement as the head of the Diyarbakir Bar Association in Turkey's southeastern Kurdish-majority city in 2015 to protest armed clashes between security forces and the youth wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

At least 43 international lawyers and human rights organizations joined forces to demand justice for Elci and his family with a joint declaration on Nov. 27. "We are concerned that the prosecution, as well as the court before which this case is being heard, fails to respect fair trial rights. We are further troubled by the Turkish authorities' continued violation of Turkey's international legal obligations to carry out a prompt, effective, impartial and independent investigation into the death of one of its citizens and to ensure a fair trial by an impartial and independent tribunal for those accused of the killing of Tahir Elci," they said.

His wife, Turkan Elci, wrote a song in Kurdish, "Hewar" (Cry), on the fifth anniversary of his death.

In an exclusive interview with Arab News, Turkan Elci said that the judicial process around her husband's killing fitted with the general atmosphere of impunity in Turkey.

She said that the independence of the judiciary could only be ensured if it was not under the influence of the executive: "A judge must decide according to the principles of universal law, the constitution and the law, as well as according to his own conscientious opinion. But it is a very remote possibility for the Tahir Elci case."

Elci's lawyers continue to try to ensure that his case file, started only five years after the murder, is not closed and are calling for the identification of the real perpetrators as they believe this is no ordinary assassination.

Following his comments about the outlawed PKK, which he said was not a terror organization but an armed political movement, Elci faced a "lynching" campaign in the mainstream media up until his death.

A 13-second section of the video footage from police cameras is missing, although Elci was killed within that time frame. The police have also failed to locate the bullet that shot him.

Forensic Architecture, a London-based independent research group, examined footage of the murder and determined that the three police officers at the scene were the most likely suspects. If the three officers accused of killing Elci are convicted they will face two to nine years in prison.

According to Ayse Bingol Demir, a human rights lawyer and co-director of the Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project, ensuring a fair trial is extremely important for several reasons.

“First, Tahir Elci was a human rights lawyer who was killed while advocating ... for ending the violence in the Kurdish region. He was a prominent figure in the human rights community, especially known for his fight against impunity and systemic human rights violations committed by the state security forces,” she told Arab News.

For Demir, Elci’s killing in broad daylight – in the presence of the press and many others – and the failure of the judiciary to carry out an effective investigation into the incident, has had a severe impact not only on his family but the wider community in Turkey.

“Second, the main issue in this case is a violation of Tahir Elci’s right to life, one of the core rights under international human rights law. Tahir Elci’s family are entitled to the right to truth, access to justice, and an effective remedy for the violation they and their loved ones have been subject to,” she said.



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Cover-up claims as police face trial over killing of Kurdish lawyer  
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## [Coronavirus threatens festive season in Lebanon](#)

Sat, 2020-11-28 21:20

BEIRUT: The two-week lockdown in Lebanon to limit the spread of coronavirus ends on Sunday, but the continued high number of infections and deaths may limit the options of the government committee tasked with restoring normal life in the country.

On Saturday, owners of shops, stores, restaurants and cafes protested against measures that would keep their businesses closed, especially as the lucrative festive season approaches.

“If the state decides to continue closing our institutions during the festive season, these tourist establishments will declare their bankruptcy,” Jean Beirouti, secretary-general of the Federation of Tourism Trade Unions, told Arab News.

Darkness prevails in Beirut markets that are usually vibrant at this time of year. “Black Friday didn’t activate any commercial movement,” Yehya Kasaa, chairman of the Lebanese Franchise Association, told Arab News.

“We don’t know how long it will be possible to hold out if a good government isn’t formed. Politics in Lebanon is fighting the economy,” he said.

“Staying at home indeed provides safety for everyone, but in a country like Lebanon, which suffers economically, it’s impossible. People need to work and earn their daily living,” he added.

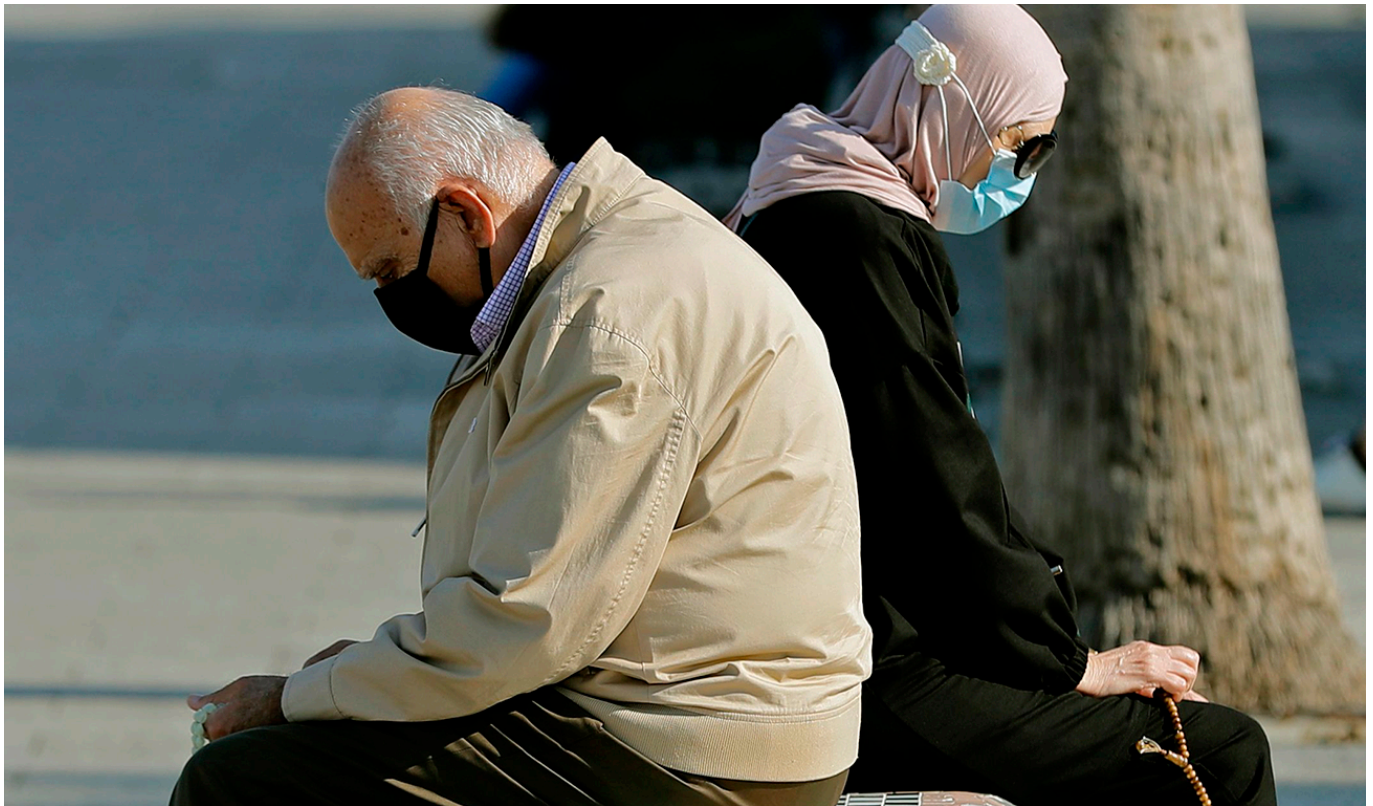
“The franchise sector used to provide work for 100,000 workers. Now half of them have lost their jobs due to the economic crisis. Moreover, the Beirut Port explosion destroyed 70 percent of the sector, especially in central Beirut, and these shops haven’t reopened yet.”

As of Saturday morning, there were more than 35,000 violations of the lockdown recorded by security forces.

“People are groaning from the difficult economic situation we’re in,” said

Col. Joseph Mousallem, head of the Information Branch at the Internal Security Forces.

“The decline in the number of infections hoped by the Ministry of Health didn’t happen during the lockdown.”



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## [US navy denies carrier group moved into Gulf after any ‘threats’](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2020-11-28 15:53

WASHINGTON: A US aircraft carrier group has moved back into the Gulf region, but a navy spokeswoman said Saturday its return was not triggered by any

“threats” after the killing in Iran of a top nuclear scientist. Tensions in the region are extraordinarily high after the assassination Friday of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, an act still unclaimed but which Iran has blamed on close US ally Israel.

But naval commander Rebecca Rebarich, a spokeswoman for the US 5th Fleet, told AFP the return Wednesday of the carrier group led by the nuclear-powered USS Nimitz was unconnected to any “specific threats.”

“There were no specific threats that triggered the return of the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group,” she said in a statement.

“The return of Nimitz is centered on maintaining CENTCOM’s ability to remain postured and prepared to help preserve regional stability and security,” Rebarich said, referring to the US Central Command.

The Pentagon said earlier that the carrier group would be providing combat support and air cover as the military withdraws thousands of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan by mid-January, under orders from President Donald Trump. About 2,000 troops will be pulled from Afghanistan and 500 from Iraq, leaving roughly 2,500 in each country.

The flotilla led by the Nimitz – one of the world’s largest warships – had recently joined Australia, India and Japan in scheduled exercises in the Arabian Sea.

The 5th Fleet’s Twitter account showed pictures of the Nimitz’s air wing conducting flight operations there Saturday.

Carrier groups typically include a cruiser, a destroyer squadron and an air wing.

Nimitz-class carriers are more than 1,000 feet (300 meters) long, have a crew of more than 6,000, and carry up to 90 helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.



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## [4 killed in southern Yemen province as Arab coalition bombs Sanaa](#)

Sun, 2020-11-29 01:00

AL-MUKALLA: Four people were killed on Friday during a mortar fire exchange between government forces and separatists in the southern province of Abyan, local military officers told Arab News.

Government forces stationed in the Sheikh Salem area shelled forces loyal to the pro-independence Southern Transitional Council (STC) on Friday night, killing four fighters – including two officers – a government officer and STC media said. The STC forces responded by shelling army locations in Abyan, causing no casualties. The STC leader, Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, mourned the four fighters in a letter to their families, describing the government's attack on his forces as a "treacherous terrorist operation."

STC media outlets said that the deadly attack was carried out by a Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drone that government forces have allegedly obtained recently. Local army commanders strongly denied receiving or using Turkish drones. "No, no, we did not use drones and we do not have any. We shelled them with 120mm mortars," the government officer, who asked to remain anonymous, told Arab News.

Sporadic fierce fighting and an exchange of artillery fire between government and the STC have occurred over the past couple of months despite the two parties' commitments to adhere to the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement. The agreement, aimed at defusing tension between the two parties, started in early 2018 by including the STC in a shared government in exchange for removing forces from Aden and other contested areas in southern Yemen.

Prime Minister-designate Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed has missed several deadlines to form a new government as political forces wrangle over key ministries and which should come first; announcing the government or withdrawing forces from contested areas.

In Houthi-held Sanaa, Arab coalition warplanes on Friday targeted a number of military sites suspected of storing ballistic missiles and drones, Yemen's defense ministry said. Warplanes hit Faj Attan and Ayban mountains west of the capital, Al-Sama military base in Arhab district, outside the capital,

and the Houthi militia's military gatherings in Jarban and Riymat Hamed military bases south of Sanaa, the ministry said in a statement on its news site. Large explosions rocked Sanaa as thick smoke billowed from targeted sites.

At the same time, fighting raged on Friday and Saturday on major battlefields across the country as government forces fought off Houthi attacks in the provinces of Taiz, Jouf, Marib and Sanaa. Local media reported on Saturday that government forces and allied tribesmen engaged in heavy fighting with the Houthis in contested areas of the central province of Marib. Arab coalition warplanes launched many airstrikes in Marib, targeting Houthi military gatherings and military equipment, which enabled government forces to push back rebels.

In Sanaa province, a ballistic missile fired by the Houthis on Saturday from an area north of the capital failed to reach its target and landed in a village shortly after its launch. Yemen Today TV and other anti-Houthi local media outlets reported that the Houthis sealed off the area where the missile landed, preventing people from leaving or entering houses.

The current conflict in Yemen began in late 2014 when the Houthis stormed the capital, Sanaa, and later expanded rapidly across the country, triggering fierce fighting with government forces.



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## [A Saudi accelerator removes roadblocks from the path of female entrepreneurs](#)

Fri, 2020-11-27 23:33

JEDDAH: From cultural or self-imposed barriers to age-old beliefs, gender-role stereotyping remains one of the biggest obstacles to women's progress in the workplace and one of the main reasons for the lack of female representation at the executive level and in startup culture in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Despite ongoing progress in the startup scene, the region still faces some unique challenges. These include the lowest female labor force participation rate (LFPR) in the world – at 24.6 percent, it trails far behind the global average of 47.8 percent.

According to Emon Shakoor, CEO of the region's first female-focused accelerator, Blossom, women's participation in professional and technical jobs is not on a par with men's. "As it is, starting a company is pretty difficult, but starting a company as a woman often had additional challenges. Gender biases and cultural beliefs added an extra layer of difficulty for women who wanted to launch their own business," Shakoor said.



Since its launch, Blossom has mentored more than 300 female-focused startups and arranged three events. (Supplied)

In 2017, when she was just 23, Shakoor launched her own venture for a strong entrepreneurial network in Saudi Arabia. However, she found it especially hard to network with the upper echelons, which is when the idea for Blossom emerged.

“At that time in Saudi Arabia, there weren’t any startup accelerators or network platforms that offered startup advice, especially ones that catered to women,” Shakoor said. “That’s when I realized that women who launched their own business in KSA faced a different set of challenges than the average Saudi male founder.

“With Blossom, I wanted to tailor an experience that met the needs of female founders while enabling and equipping them with everything they need to know to overcome the barriers they might face along the way. This is a global phenomenon; it happens even in Silicon Valley.”

## **INNUMBERS**

### **Female workplace progress**

**\* 24.6% Female labor force participation rate in MENA.**

**\* \$36m Total funding for startups founded by women in 2019.**

As noted in a recent MAGNiTT report in relation to MENA, “5.1 percent (\$36 million) of total funding went to startups with only female founders in 2019, which is close to double the figure in the US. Beyond that, startups with only female founders accounted for 4.5 percent of all deals in 2019, more than twice the percentage in the US.”

While Shakoor acknowledges there have been noteworthy efforts to increase female participation in the economy, “we still have a long way to go.” The Jeddah-based accelerator gives early-stage startups the opportunity to participate in a boot camp and a demo day while also providing them with resources, knowledge, networking and access to mentors, speakers and investors.

“Startups get mentorship on everything – from business models, introduction to entrepreneurship, lean principles, hands-on implementation, marketing and finance, and a lot more,” Shakoor said.

“We believe one of our differentiation points here at Blossom is our heavily mentored programs that give access to mentors and speakers from both Silicon Valley and the region. Having that international exposure, alongside local expertise, gives our female-focused startups a 360-picture of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.”



The Jeddah-based accelerator gives early-stage startups the opportunity to participate in a boot camp and a demo day while also providing them with resources, knowledge, networking and access to mentors, speakers and investors. (Supplied)

Since its launch, Blossom has mentored more than 300 female-focused startups and arranged three events: Techpreneurship Sprint (a one-day business plan competition for technology startup ideas), SELLA (a technology entrepreneurship function focused on idea-sharing, inspiration and networking), and THIQAH (a female-empowerment event teaching women how to be more confident and create the company they deserve). And a fourth virtual event is underway.

“The coronavirus has motivated us to take our event online. Going virtual means reaching more startups across the globe and expanding our Blossom network worldwide. We always had the idea for the online accelerator, but the virus expedited the process for us,” Shakoor said.

Blossom continues to grow and evolve, with mentorship programs spanning the GCC and MENA, but Shakoor says she is just getting started. “I see Blossom being the accelerator and platform for female founders in MENA, the place for any woman who wants to start or grow a company to go to and ultimately scale and succeed.

“We’re also planning on starting our own fund to grow our business and network and eventually invest in multiple talents across this part of the world.”

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*Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.*



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