



Acceptance speech by Zeynep Oral, President of PEN-Turkey and columnist representing Cumhuriyet, at the 2016 Right Livelihood Award Ceremony

Dear Mr. Jakob von Uexkull,

Dear members of the Jury of the Right Livelihood Award,

Dear Guests,

To receive an award is always special. But to receive the Right Livelihood Award, a deeply rooted award that strengthens human values, well known throughout the world as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize', and to receive it during these unusual circumstances that we are living in, has a greater importance for the Cumhuriyet newspaper than you can imagine. Before I share with you the deep meaning of this award for us, I would like to forward the message of Mr. Orhan Erinç, the chairman of the Cumhuriyet Foundation.

"On behalf of Cumhuriyet, I would like to express my gratitude to the jury members for honouring us with the 'Alternative Nobel Prize' and thus giving us an immeasurable support in these difficult days. I also congratulate our fellow Laureates who share the award with us. I would like to assure you that we will do our best to be worthy of this valuable award and never give up defending democracy, freedom and secularism no matter what. Please accept our greetings and best regards."

He wanted to convey this message to you himself, but it was not possible. He is not allowed to leave the country.

The daily newspaper Cumhuriyet is the oldest newspaper of the Republic of Turkey. It is as old as the Republic. The name of the newspaper was given by the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It is considered to be the reference newspaper of the country both in Turkey and around the world. Cumhuriyet does not belong to any financial group. To say it in other words: Cumhuriyet is a newspaper without an owner. It is owned by the Cumhuriyet Foundation, by those who work at the newspaper. In that sense it a rather unique newspaper with just a few equivalents in the world.

The strength of the newspaper comes from its readers and from those who work there. The strength comes also from defending the rights of the people who have been unjustly treated... from standing side by side with those who are oppressed



and exploited... from being the voice of those who cannot raise their voices... from supporting gender equality in society... from supporting nature and environment as priorities...from supporting peace and tolerance against violence and hate, and diversity of voices in the society against a single voice...and we get our strength from never giving up our search for truth.

Cumhuriyet represents the enlightened and the contemporary face of Turkey.

In Cumhuriyet's honorable past there have been days when our journalists have been killed, days when our journalists have been thrown into prison.

In these days in Turkey where democracy, justice, separation of powers, the freedom of expression and the freedom of press is considered as almost nonexistent, our newspaper has faced a vulgar and unjust attack. The government forces are attempting to silence Cumhuriyet, which is the only influential newspaper in Turkey defending democracy, human rights and freedoms, and secularism.

On 31th of October, 12 journalists and Foundation managers were arrested at five o'clock in the morning at their homes and taken into custody. This was the start of the operation to silence Cumhuriyet.

After five days, two of our senior journalists were released but were prohibited from travelling abroad. Ten of our friends were imprisoned and accused of supporting terrorism just because of what they have written, drawn and reported, simply because of exercising their profession.

We do not know when they will be taken to court. This can be a very long process. We do not know if they will be released by the court on conditions of trial without arrest.

Regardless of all that we continue to publish our newspaper. We try to keep Cumhuriyet alive without giving up defending democracy, freedom of press and secularism.

We are struggling against countless difficulties, financial problems and oppression. This is true. But we believe that we can overcome these difficulties. The support of our readers, the solidarity meetings arranged in our garden at almost every hour of the day, our commitment to freedom of thought and expression, our respect of the right of getting objective news, makes our task easier for us.



In these circumstances, the solidarity that we receive from Turkey and from almost all countries in the world, has a great significance. But being awarded the 'Alternative Nobel Prize' has a very special meaning.

The Award expresses the feeling that we are not alone in these difficult days dominated by aggression and violence. That we should not be afraid. The Award declares to the whole world that we are not going to give up and abandon our commitments because of the oppression.

We are totally aware that without freedom of thought and expression it is not possible to maintain democracy, to have rights and freedoms, to develop knowledge, to have discussions, to look forward and to have any hope. The only force that can defeat darkness, oppression, violence and nonexistent justice is the unconditional defence of freedom and secularism. We are aware that there is no other force that we can rely upon and gain strength from than the force of solidarity. The 'Alternative Nobel Prize' that we receive during these very crucial days is therefore like a light of hope and solidarity that is so essential for us.

We are trying and we will keep on trying to be worthy of the award.

I would once more like to thank the Jury members and congratulate our new friends and fellow Laureates who share the award with us.