

# PRESS RELEASE

## Paris, 24 January 2024



### CARTOONISTS RIGHTS

### Criminal trial for “obscenity” for a cartoon in Türkiye: The judicial stranglehold is maintained around the cartoonist Zehra Ömeroğlu

The trial of the cartoonist Zehra Ömeroğlu, criminally prosecuted for “obscenity” for the publication of the cartoon below, published on **November 25, 2020** in the humorous magazine *Leman*, has just been adjourned for the fourth time since the launch of the proceedings by the Turkish Public Prosecutor’s Office. Her lawyer denounces a clear violation of her right to a fair trial, guaranteed by Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.



Translation:

*Pandemic sex... “At least I didn’t lose my taste and smell...”*

On **October 5, 2022**, Zehra Ömeroğlu appeared for the first time before the 2nd District Court of Istanbul. Since then, her trial, initially scheduled for **October 17, 2022**, has continued to be postponed.

During the most recent hearing on **January 9, 2024**, yet another postponement was recorded on the grounds that the Obscene Publications Commission (“Muzır Neşriyat Kurulu”), linked to the Ministry of Family and Minor Protection Services, had still not submitted its report determining whether or not the incriminated drawing was obscene. This marks the third time that the report, without which a trial cannot proceed to a conclusion, has not been produced.

These delays amount to a form of legal harassment against the cartoonist.



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If found guilty Zehra Ömeroğlu faces a sentence of six months to three years in prison, as well as a fine. The gendered dimension of these criminal proceedings must be underlined. Her humor is bawdy, but the same drawing from a man would scarcely be noted as “obscene”.

Over the same period Zehra Ömeroğlu was also the subject of repeated threats. Mediatic coverage of her case was followed by a widespread campaign of harassment on social media, including death threats, which intensified following the publication of another cartoon.

**Whatever the outcome of the trial, a heavy burden weighs on Zehra Ömeroğlu’s freedom of expression in Türkiye, where she describes a deteriorating climate for freedom of expression and artistic production.**

**While waiting for the next hearing scheduled for April 16, 2024, Cartooning for Peace and Cartoonists Rights, who had alerted about her situation in November 2022, denounce the relentlessness suffered by the cartoonist, with this procedure which keeps her in a cycle of psychological suffering and of uncertainty.**

**From postponement to postponement, this needlessly protracted legal procedure has threatened to muzzle a brave cartoonist for the temerity of being funny and a woman. Through April it will be the focus of our continued vigilance.**

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### **Cartooning for Peace**

The Cartooning for Peace organisation was created in 2006 at the initiative of Kofi Annan, Nobel Peace Prize and former General Secretary of the United Nations, and press cartoonist Plantu. Now chaired by French press cartoonist Kak, Cartooning for Peace is an international network of cartoonists committed to the promotion of freedom of expression, Human Rights and mutual respect among people upholding different cultures and beliefs, using the universal language of press cartoons.

### **Cartoonists Rights**

Cartoonists Rights Network International - Cartoonists Rights for short - is a human rights NGO founded in 1999. Based in the USA, with a voluntary network of regional representative cartoonists, legal experts, and human rights defenders around the world, its mission is to strengthen the interconnectedness of cartoonists, campaign to protect their human rights, and defend those abused, threatened, criminalised or displaced because of their work.