

Transparency International Turkey Press Release

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We Need Transparency, Accountability and Civic Involvement in Urban Development

There has been an ongoing process of urban renewal within Istanbul since 2011. Although the reasons for this renewal have been ever changing, certain issues have been common denominators of this process; it lacks transparency, civic involvement, and is ruthlessly domineering.

The events unfolded in Gezi Park are in response to this process of urban renewal. The Taksim Project, announced in 2012, initially aimed to pedestrianise Taksim Square and amalgamate it with Gezi Park, however, later announcements stated that Park would be demolished to create a space for the redevelopment of the Artillery Barracks which was situated there years ago. Whilst protests against the demolition of the Park continued, the concerns of the protestors were not addressed by officials, who have only made ambiguous statements regarding the issue. For what purpose this building will be used once it has been built is still unknown.

Opinions stated most frequently are that it will be used for commercial purposes as a shopping mall, a hotel or as offices. However, what many people from different political backgrounds agree upon is that public spaces should be used to further public interests, that the people should be able to participate in the decision making process and governing bodies should be transparent and accountable on urban policies.

This example of solidarity presents a movement towards and demand for democratic principles from the bottom-up. In response to this demand, public officials should appeal to the concerns of the public and take the required action to address these concerns.

Another important concern voiced by the public is the media's approach to these recent developments. The media has hindered the exchange of information and muted public opinion by censoring the events that have taken place during the first few days of the Gezi Park Resistance. We would like to reiterate that the role of the media, one of the prime facilitators of democracy, is to provide the public with accurate information and act as a watchdog for the public.

The ongoing movement that has persevered since the 28th of May to this day has provided ample proof for the need of accountable, transparent and democratic governing bodies through which the public can voice their opinion and engage in decision making processes, and the need for an independent media.

The police response to these peaceful protests, despite the right to peaceful protest being a necessary constituent of democracy, is worrying. Two people have died as a result of police intervention. The use of extreme force against protestors, who are exercising their legal right to protest peacefully, should immediately be abandoned.

In the wake of such terrible events, we invite public officials to be prudent, engaging and mindful of ethical principles when considering urban renewal policies.

TI-Turkey