

# PRESS RELEASE

## Paris, 11 April 2024



**Freedom  
Cartoonists**  
DESSINS POUR LA LIBERTÉ

**FREEMUSE**  
DEFENDING ARTISTIC FREEDOM

## Solidarity with cartoonist Zehra Ömeroğlu on the eve of her trial in Türkiye

Press release, 11 April 2024 - A few days before her criminal trial on obscenity charges, scheduled for 16 April in Istanbul, Cartooning for Peace, Cartoonists' Rights, the Freedom Cartoonist Foundation and Freemuse reiterate their support for cartoonist Zehra Ömeroğlu of Türkiye, over whom the prospect of criminalisation hangs like a veritable lead blanket.

Zehra Ömeroğlu faces a sentence ranging from 6 months to 3 years' imprisonment, as well as the payment of a fine, for a cartoon on the symptoms of Covid-19 published on 25 November 2020 in the Turkish humor magazine Leman. Her situation is recorded on [the Council of Europe's Platform for the Safety of Journalists](#).



Translation: «Pandemic sex... - At least I didn't lose my taste and smell...»

On 8 March 2024, Türkiye's Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications («Muzır Neşriyat Kurulu») concluded that the cartoon «offends public decency and modesty and is contrary to general morality», arguing that the cartoonist «arouses and exploits sexual desires». These conclusions pave the way for her trial, which has been postponed four times since her first appearance in court in May 2021. Even though her lawyer contests the findings, as Turkish law allows, the hearing will go ahead on 16 April, where the likelihood of a conviction is increased on the basis of the Board's conclusions.

Zehra Ömeroğlu works for local media aiming to liberate women's voices. Her cartoons have appeared in numerous publications, in Türkiye and abroad, and she has had three books of her works published. She likes to focus on women's rights, taboos and human psychology. These criminal proceedings have plunged her into deep despair, while severely restricting her professional prospects.

In [an interview](#) conducted in October 2022, Zehra Ömeroğlu said: «I'm a humorist and the aim of my work is to look at everyday problems from a different angle, with a lighter touch so that we can laugh about them together. But even such a harmless drawing can be subjected to severe judgement. The readers didn't think that my drawing could be punished.»

Although Türkiye is bound to protect freedom of expression, guaranteed by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and by its own Constitution, which also guarantees freedom of the press and the free dissemination of art, the country is ranked 165/180 in the Reporters without borders World Press Freedom Index 2023.

**Determined to defend Zehra Ömeroğlu, our organizations express their full solidarity with her in the face of the trial, the outcome of which will be a true marker of the scale of the attacks on freedom of expression, and of the space allocated to women's freedom of expression and feminist artistic production in Türkiye.**

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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.

[www.cartooningforpeace.org](http://www.cartooningforpeace.org)



### CARTOONISTS RIGHTS

Cartoonists Rights is a human rights NGO founded in 1999. Based in the United States, and with a network of regional representatives of cartoonists, legal experts and human rights defenders around the world, its mission is to strengthen the interconnection of cartoonists, campaign to protect their fundamental rights and defend those who are abused, threatened, criminalised or displaced because of their work.

[www.cartoonistsrights.org](http://www.cartoonistsrights.org)



### FREEDOM CARTOONISTS FOUNDATION

The Freedom Cartoonists Foundation supports professional editorial cartooning as an essential part of civic debate. It stands for a free press as a pillar of democracy and of which political cartoons are a vital element. Through its actions, it defends freedom of speech in a spirit of dialogue.

[www.freedomcartoonists.com](http://www.freedomcartoonists.com)



### FREEMUSE

Freemuse is dedicated to defending and advocating for artistic freedom globally. Its focus is on protecting and promoting freedom of expression for musicians, artists and creative individuals worldwide. It works to raise awareness about censorship persecution and other repression that artists face due to their work. It monitors and documents violations of artistic freedom, provides support and assistance to artists at risk and collaborates with organisations, governments and individuals to create positive change.

[www.freemuse.org](http://www.freemuse.org)