

Human rights award for mayor of war-torn Kurdish town of Cizre

by The Region - 08/11/2018 12:56



The International League for Human Rights (ILHR) awarded Leyla Imret, Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeastern town of Cizre's former co-mayor, and human rights defender Ottmar Miles-Paul.

ILHR has been giving an award to individuals, engaged in civilian society and human rights, in the name of the German journalist, writer and pacifist Carl von Ossietzky since 1962.

Cizre was a frontline of the war pursued by Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) seeking greater minority rights and freedom of Kurdish people. It is a town synonymous with stories of death, torture and violence.

After Turkish security forces killed her father, a leading local Kurdish activist, Imret was brought up by relatives in Germany. After 22 years, she returned to Cizre for the first time.

She was inspired to carry on her father's struggle and to seek the nomination to run for mayor for the pro-Kurdish BDP which would later be the vital part of the pro-democracy alliance Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

Leyla Imret became Turkey's youngest mayor when she was elected at age 27. She was elected mayor of Cizre in 2014 after winning 83 percent of the votes.

In 2016 a trustee was appointed to Cizre by Ankara through a State of Emergency Decree. In the same year, Imret was quickly detained by law enforcement but was released after testifying with a ban on leaving the country.

"Imret was elected with 83% of the vote. She strived to develop Cizre again after the heavy toll of the war and to ensure equality in the city. Following the 2015 parliamentary elections, the Turkish-Kurdish conflict flared up again, and a curfew was declared in Cizre. Imret was later removed from office and investigations were launched against her, at which point she was forced to return to Germany," said the statement of the International League for Human Rights.

"She fought to return to her office as the Mayor of Cizre in exile. She advocates a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey, and maintains her work to that end," the statement continued.

The Turkish government's crackdown on the Kurdish political movement began in late 2016 with the arrest of high profile politicians, including the party's then co-chairs, Figen Yuksekdag and Selahattin Demirtas, which led to the detention of at least 5,000 members of the HDP, including 80 mayors.

Trustees have been appointed to dozens of municipalities in the country's predominantly Kurdish Southeast. There are currently 9 HDP deputies behind bars. The developments have attracted widespread criticism from the region and Western countries.