

What is Happening in Istanbul?

By [Global Research News](#)

Global Research, June 03, 2013
defnesumanblogs.com

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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To my friends who live outside of Turkey:

I am writing to let you know what is going on in Istanbul for the last five days. I personally have to write this because most of the media sources are shut down by the government and the word of mouth and the internet are the only ways left for us to explain ourselves and call for help and support.

Four days ago a group of people most of whom did not belong to any specific organization or ideology got together in Istanbul's Gezi Park. Among them there were many of my friends and students. Their reason was simple: To prevent and protest the upcoming demolishing of the park for the sake of building yet another shopping mall at very center of the city. There are numerous shopping malls in Istanbul, at least one in every neighborhood! The tearing down of the trees was supposed to begin early Thursday morning. People went to the park with their blankets, books and children. They put their tents down and spent the night under the trees. Early in the morning when the bulldozers started to pull the hundred-year-old trees out of the ground, they stood up against them to stop the operation.

They did nothing other than standing in front of the machines.

No newspaper, no television channel was there to report the protest. It was a complete media black out.

But the police arrived with water cannon vehicles and pepper spray. They chased the crowds out of the park.

In the evening the number of protesters multiplied. So did the number of police forces around the park. Meanwhile local government of Istanbul shut down all the ways leading up to Taksim square where the Gezi Park is located. The metro was shut down, ferries were cancelled, roads were blocked.

Yet more and more people made their way up to the center of the city by walking.

They came from all around Istanbul. They came from all different backgrounds, different ideologies, different religions. They all gathered to prevent the demolition of something bigger than the park:

The right to live as honorable citizens of this country.

They gathered and marched. Police chased them with pepper spray and tear gas and drove their tanks over people who offered the police food in return. Two young people were run over by the panzers and were killed. Another young woman, a friend of mine, was hit in the head by one of the incoming tear gas canisters. The police were shooting them straight into the crowd. After a three hour operation she is still in Intensive Care Unit and in very critical condition. As I write this we don't know if she is going to make it. This blog is dedicated to her.

These people are my friends. They are my students, my relatives. They have no «hidden agenda» as the state likes to say. Their agenda is out there. It is very clear. The whole country is being sold to corporations by the government, for the construction of malls, luxury condominiums, freeways, dams and nuclear plants. The government is looking for (and creating when necessary) any excuse to attack Syria against its people's will.

On top of all that, the government control over its people's personal lives has become unbearable as of late. The state, under its conservative agenda passed many laws and regulations concerning abortion, cesarean birth, sale and use of alcohol and even the color of lipstick worn by the airline stewardesses.

People who are marching to the center of Istanbul are demanding their right to live freely and receive justice, protection and respect from the State. They demand to be involved in the decision-making processes about the city they live in.

What they have received instead is excessive force and enormous amounts of tear gas shot straight into their faces. Three people lost their eyes.

Yet they still march. Hundred of thousands join them. Couple of more thousand passed the Bosphorus Bridge on foot to support the people of Taksim.

No newspaper or TV channel was there to report the events. They were busy with broadcasting news about Miss Turkey and "the strangest cat of the world".

Police kept chasing people and spraying them with pepper spray to an extent that stray dogs and cats were poisoned and died by it.

Schools, hospitals and even 5 star hotels around Taksim Square opened their doors to the injured. Doctors filled the classrooms and hotel rooms to provide first aid. Some police officers refused to spray innocent people with tear gas and quit their jobs. Around the square they placed jammers to prevent internet connection and 3g networks were blocked. Residents and businesses in the area provided free wireless network for the people on the streets. Restaurants offered food and water for free.

People in Ankara and İzmir gathered on the streets to support the resistance in Istanbul.

Mainstream media kept showing Miss Turkey and "the strangest cat of the world". ***

I am writing this letter so that you know what is going on in Istanbul. Mass media will not tell you any of this. Not in my country at least. Please post as many as articles as you see on the Internet and spread the word.

As I was posting articles that explained what is happening in Istanbul on my Facebook page last night someone asked me the following question:

«What are you hoping to gain by complaining about our country to foreigners?»

This blog is my answer to her.

By so called «complaining» about my country I am hoping to gain:

Freedom of expression and speech,

Respect for human rights,

Control over the decisions I make concerning my on my body,

The right to legally congregate in any part of the city without being considered a terrorist.

But most of all by spreading the word to you, my friends who live in other parts of the world, I am hoping to get your awareness, support and help!

Please spread the word and share this blog.

Thank you!

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