



Cihan Hayirsevener  
19 December 2009  
Bandırma, Turkey

# CIHAN HAYIRSEVENER

**ON 19 DECEMBER 2009**, 53-year-old journalist Cihan Hayirsevener was shot on his way home in Bandırma, a port town on the Sea of Marmara in north-west Turkey. The assailant immediately fled the crime scene in a vehicle that was waiting for him.

Several hours later, local police announced that Hayirsevener had lost his life at the Uludag University Hospital in the neighbouring city of Bursa. The announcement was intended to prevent social unrest from breaking out in Bandırma. In truth, according to the author's sources, Hayirsevener had lost his life in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. The bullet had severed a major artery in his left leg, and he succumbed to heavy loss of blood.

At the time, Hayirsevener was the managing editor at *Güney Marmara'da Yaşam* (meaning 'life in South Marmara'), a daily newspaper he'd founded that covered local societal, political and economic news. Located in the province of Balıkesir some 116 kilometres south of Istanbul, Bandırma has a population of more than 150 000 people, and is home to one of Turkey's major ports.

Before his death, Hayirsevener had been investigating and reporting on several corruption cases that involved the Bandırma municipality, the town's mayor and several local businessmen. According to his colleagues and family, he had received several death threats.

'I am afraid. I think they will do something treacherous. I feel that something bad will happen,' Hayirsevener had told his friend and colleague, Ramazan Demir, onboard a ferry to Istanbul just two days before the murder. Demir added: 'He said that he would tell me everything in the next [couple of] days, but that never happened ...

'Cihan was a senior journalist who had worked at leading national media houses. He later moved to Bandırma [in 1999], a town he loved. He started to cover the town as a journalist and investigated very troublesome topics,' Demir explains.

Demir is chair of the Balıkesir Journalists' Association. Hayirsevener had encouraged him to run for this position, as he thought the organization could serve its cause more effectively. Later, both Demir and Hayirsevener joined the administration of the association. At the time of his murder, Hayirsevener was a member of the association's disciplinary committee.



A room at the Balikesir Journalists' Association offices dedicated to Cihan Hayirsevener



Hayirsevener’s funeral ceremony was held in Istanbul on 22 December 2009. He had previously worked in the city, and his family still lived there. Family, friends, journalists, representatives from the association, human-rights groups and many other people attended the service. ‘The reason why he was murdered was that he did his job and wrote the truth,’ said Demir, recalling what the journalist’s daughter, Gaye Hayirsevener-Clifford, had said at the ceremony. Later, in an interview with the Turkish daily, *Vatan*, she said: ‘My father was a hero. He worked as a journalist for 29 years. He loved Bandirma and Balikesir and dedicated his life to fighting against crime gangs and corruption, which only harm the city.’

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Hayirsevener had been reporting on a local corruption scandal involving three owners of *Ilkhaber*, a daily newspaper in Bandirma. They were found guilty of accepting cash pay-outs from a former mayor. Before his death, Hayirsevener’s investigation was believed to be focusing on what the payments had been intended for.

‘At the time of the murder, the owners of *Ilkhaber* were already in prison, but it didn’t stop them from taking Cihan’s life. Those people even owned a media house as a vehicle to blame other groups and promote themselves and their interests. Cihan had

revealed their politically linked underground life, and the media started to cover this issue, thanks to Cihan’s efforts,’ Demir said. The corruption scandal amounted to some 20 million Turkish lira (close to US\$13 million at the 2009 exchange rate). It included the construction of a thermal power plant, which Hayirsevener and his media house criticized.

At the time of the murder, the owner of *Ilkhaber* Media, Ihsan Kuruoğlu, was in prison on previous corruption charges. In 2013, he was sentenced to 17 years for masterminding and ordering Hayirsevener’s murder, and another 10 years for establishing an armed crime organization, violating firearms law, and corruption charges. Surprisingly, the court also ruled that Hayirsevener’s writing about Kuruoğlu was a reason for an unjust provocation.

Hayirsevener’s killer, Serkan Erakkus, was sentenced to life. Five other Kuruoğlu family members and *Ilkhaber* Media workers were sentenced to terms that varied from two to 11 years.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF in French) said it welcomed the court’s ruling. ‘The decision is an encouraging one for all reporters in Turkey who were attacked and threatened by powerful local interest groups. However, the court’s interpretation of the unjust provocation was intolerable after the death of journalist Hayirsevener,’ RSF said, as *Bia.net* reported.

‘Being a local journalist is a very hard job. First, you always have financial issues and you do not have the support of national media. Cihan was receiving death threats but no one provided security for him,’ said Demir. ‘Cihan’s murder was a message to journalists about what may happen to them when they report the truth about organized-crime groups and other dark structures. Unfortunately, nothing got better after Cihan’s death and the court ruling.’

Demir and his association think that only journalists can protect journalists though their solidarity. Every year, the Balikesir Journalists’ Association Organizes events to commemorate Hayirsevener and his murder to raise public awareness about the protection of journalists. ‘We organize events at the anniversary of Cihan’s murder; we tell his story to people. We also have a room dedicated to Cihan, which is open to visitors. We have not forgotten and will not forget Cihan,’ Demir adds. Hayirsevener was also acknowledged as a martyr for press freedom by the Turkish Journalists’ Association.

*The author would like to thank the Balikesir Journalists’ Association for sharing photos from its archive.*

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