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Stop Proposed Amendments that Would Kill Stray Dogs

Dear Honorable President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Members of Parliament,

I'm writing to inform you that Lady Freethinker, an animal advocacy organization based in Los Angeles, wants to express our opposition toward the 2024 proposed amendments to the Animal Protection Law (Law 5199, 2004) that would mandate the rounding up and killing of stray dogs in Turkiye. While we understand the U.S. dog shelter system is far from perfect, as an international organization, Lady Freethinker is concerned about animals' wellbeing both domestically and around the world.

The provision granting 30 days or more post-gather to adoption institutes insufficient time for stray animals to be properly rehabilitated and given a fair chance. Dogs – particularly those who may have experienced severe trauma – often require a substantially longer period to become properly rehabilitated and ready for placement into a loving home. Furthermore, the requirement of all municipalities to round up the entirety of strays and place them in shelters, regardless of their sterilization status, will create unmanageable conditions. Many shelters do not have the capacity to care for a drastic increase in occupants, as they possess limited resources and space.

In addition to the lack of assets and capacity, the conditions of Turkiye's animal shelters have been reported to be abysmal, exhibiting extreme cruelty from particular staff as well as inadequate housing for the animals. In 2022, a viral video exhibited one shelter employee, along with an accomplice, beating a shelter dog to death with a shovel while the other person attempted to strangle the animal.¹ We are working closely with Yaşam İçin Yasa İnisiyatifi (Law for Life Initiative) based in Turkiye, who shared images and footage of shelters with appalling conditions: kennels infested with urine and feces, lack of access to fresh water or food, animals

¹Inanc, Y. S. (2022, December 4). Turkey: Dog abuse video sparks debate over what to do with millions of stray dogs. *Middle East Eye*.

crowded together, emaciated and on the brink of death, some appearing lifeless or severely injured. With minimal oversight and legal sanctions, there will be more abuse and neglect left unexposed, allowing for unchecked suffering to flourish.

In terms of gathering protocol, the notion that “aggressive, rabies-risk, eating-disordered, and anatomically deformed” dogs will be prioritized for collection is unethical and implausible, as identifying such cases in the streets and among overcrowded shelters with pressing medical needs will be extremely challenging for shelter staff and veterinarians.² This requirement tasks far too much decision-making on local municipalities, who are not equipped with sufficient qualified staff. Dogs identified to be “put down” – in reality, killed – should be treated, rehabilitated and rehomed. If not, this practice would be, first and foremost, a fundamental violation of the right to life.

We ask that you consider an alternative approach to stray population control. We believe it is vital to find methods for humans and animals to peacefully coexist, as Türkiye has already done for centuries, thus setting a precedent for other countries. With this proposed amendment, only a small percentage of animals will make it out alive. By prioritizing systematic and ethical sterilization programs, promoting public awareness campaigns for cohabitation, and encouraging adoptions from temporary treatment, care and rehabilitation centers (shelters), there will be avenues that are globally proven to be effective in managing the free-roaming population of dogs. Implementing a robust system to track and legally penalize animal abandonment with deterrent penalties, alongside measures to cease commercial and home-based breeding as well as the sale of animals on all platforms, will provide scientifically proven solutions that effectively reduce the dog population. It is imperative that we move beyond outdated and ravaging practices such as mass confinement and extermination, ensuring that these methods are not only avoided but also removed from the discourse of animal welfare and rights in the 21st century.

Sincerely,
Nina Jackel
President, Lady Freethinker

² *Erdoğan leads AKP's 'consultation camp' with local agenda - türkiye news. Hürriyet Daily News.*