

ELAW Fellow Gonca Yilmaz

Public Interest Environmental Law in Turkey

ELAW Fellow Gonca Yilmaz is here in Eugene gaining skills that will help her protect her native Turkey. Gonca is this year's Laurie Prosser/Xiaoli Jiang Fellow. Gonca co-founded the Denge Ecological Association and recently joined a small group of public interest-minded lawyers who have established the Çevre Hukuku Dernegi (Environmental Law Association or ÇHD). This new organization is representing citizens in environmental battles and plans to grow the corps of public interest lawyers in Turkey and reform Turkey's environmental laws.

"Turkey is home to valuable biological and cultural diversity, but this diversity is vulnerable because the legal infrastructure that should protect it is extremely weak, and development pressure is strong," says Gonca. "Turkey does not have statutes designed to protect air, wildlife, or water – or to address the threat of climate change."

Gonca and her colleagues are working to protect Igneada, a small town on the Black Sea in Turkey's Kırklareli Province, from plans to build a coal-fired power plant. The proposed power plant threatens the area's unique ecosystems, including oak forests and one of the few remaining floodplain forests in all of Europe, home to many different bird species. The area is home to the "longoz" tree, only found in two other regions: the Amazon and the Congo. Roads were built last year to improve access to the project site and the government is now considering building a nuclear power plant.

During her Fellowship, Gonca is collaborating with ELAW staff to build the capacity of ÇHD to assist the residents of Igneada, and seek support for efforts to reform Turkey's environmental laws, develop environmental law curricula for Turkey's law schools, and provide support to citizens facing environmental and human rights challenges.

ELAW Fellowships have proven very effective and ELAW has hosted more than 150 environmental professionals from around the world. If you are interested in supporting the ELAW Fellows Program or getting involved with the ELAW Host Family Program, please contact Maggie Keenan, ELAW Fellows Program Coordinator (maggie@elaw.org).

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