

Gothenburg native experiences Turkey protests

Written by Austin Benson
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Allison Block, a 1997 graduate of Gothenburg High School, came back to the United States recently from Turkey to try and shine a positive light on the country in which she works

Block said Turkey has been a sea of protest for the past several weeks after Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan planned to tear down Gezi Park, the only remaining green space in the heart of Istanbul.

“What began as a group of peaceful protestors in Gezi Park, rapidly escalated into brutal, unprovoked police attacks on civilians,” Block said.

When the first action of what Block called “unnecessary violence,” was displayed under Erdogan’s command, it encouraged other protestors to gather in Taksim Square and at Gezi Park.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, there have been more than 49 journalists thrown in jail since the protests began—a tactic by Erdogan to suppress the amount of leaked news of his actions, Block said.

Reporting restrictions like fines against stations airing live broadcasts of the protest led to the use of social media tweets, posts and live links used to spread the news of what the protestors and Istanbul police are dealing with, she said.

“This really opened the floodgates for the use of Internet by civilians,” Block said.

Because civilians are acting as journalists to the rest of the world, Block said Erdogan has

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stepped up on that front and arrested civilians he claims to have caused civil unrest.

Threats continue to block all social media outlets.

What impresses Block, she said, is that all walks of life are represented in the protests of Gezi Park, Taksim Square and throughout the country.

“These protests are unprecedented in the history of Turkey,” Block said. “They are completely grass rooted and organized by civilians.”

Block said Turkish people have never seen anything like this before and are using this opportunity to stand up.

There are women, children, elderly, Sunnis, Kurds and others represented in the protest and all of them have been the target of water tanks or tear gas at some point, Block said.

When asked if she had protested at Gezi Park, Block said she hadn't because she lives in Ankara but she has protested near her home where there is less risk of police attacks.

Block said things are tense because of defiant and continuous messages sent from the prime minister.

The people are protesting for a real democracy and for a prime minister that is less authoritative, Block said.

She said Erdogan has insulted his own people, calling them bums, drunks and losers in the media, which has not made the protestors any less motivated.

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Block has lived in Turkey for about five of the last 10 years and worked in the Turkish Embassy for a year in 2002-2003.

She now owns a tourism company focused on bringing American Christians who are interested in seeing biblical sites that are offered in the country to Turkey.

Block has returned to the United States because she thinks face-to-face contact will be more effective in encouraging Americans to go to Turkey, especially with the recent events.

“To assure potential clients of their safety concerns in Turkey, the best way is to meet them in person, because a brochure cannot provide such assurance,” Block said.

While living in Turkey, Block said she has never felt directly threatened or in danger.

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