

We Announce the Theme of the 31st Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week: WE ARE RETURNING

Since 1993, we, the queers who have been filling the streets, alleys, parks, gardens, cafes, restaurants, bars, pubs, taverns, patisseries, and inns with joy, are RETURNING to the public spaces you have been trying to steal from us for the 31st time this year. You have been trying to remove us from our streets, avenues, and neighbourhoods for years; We are returning. Now, once again, despite the bans, pressures, and censorship, we are RETURNING.

Just as we remember the resistance of trans sex workers who went on a hunger strike on the steps of Gezi Park in 1987, we do not forget our marches that overflowed with thousands of people. We do not forget the queers who resisted the pressures and raids, who defeated your anger every time with resistance, unity, and solidarity, from Hortum Süleyman to Fotoroman Süleyman. In its 10th year, we greet the Gezi Resistance that instilled fear in your hearts and the queers who resisted the denialist policies of the AKP* throughout the resistance. This year, we are here again, WE ARE RETURNING. We are returning to Gezi Park, İstiklal Avenue, Tarlaözü, Kadıköy, Gazi, Sulukule. We are RETURNING to our sealed homes, neighborhoods, the places we call home, again and again.

Against the increasing transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, whorephobia, HIV-phobia, aphobia, lesbophobia, and the policies that isolate us regarding our queerness, against male-dominated state policies, and police blockades, WE ARE RETURNING.

Since 2015, our marches and events have been banned under various pretexts. We declare that AKP, which withdrew from the Istanbul Convention overnight, has opened the doors to many forms of hatred and is responsible for all of this. The police, as an instrument of oppression, constantly increase their power against queers, women+, Kurds, Armenians, and Alevis. We are not afraid of the violence of the patriarchal state; we are returning back from the spaces you are trying to push us away from. We do not give up on the streets.

Our struggles and resistances for rights continue in every field, from education to health, from transportation to housing. We do not accept the closure of BÜLGBTI+, the detention of 373 people with police and state violence during the 30th Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week, the denial and assimilation policies towards the Kurdish people, the increasing difficulty in accessing hormones, the banning of the March 8 Feminist Night Walks and May 1st march.

We commemorate all our people who have been killed as a result of the earthquake disaster centered in Maraş, which has affected Turkey, Kurdistan, and Syria, and the shameless corruption and lawlessness of the male-dominated state. We declare that we will hold you accountable. Your end will come. While the situation of brothels in the earthquake-stricken cities is still unknown, the inequalities experienced by LGBTI+ individuals, especially us trans people, in the region also reveal the extent of the hatred we are subjected to. We face discrimination, threats, and violence from the state that imposes enemy laws on us in gender-segregated collective housing areas. Trans people receiving hormone therapy and LGBTI+ individuals living with HIV cannot access the medication they need every day. We, as trans people, women+, immigrants, children, minorities, and LGBTI+ individuals, face isolation and violence even in ordinary circumstances. We reject this; we return with the anger of our friends whom you have hurt, ignored, and killed, and the fury of the voiceless people you have not heard. Our deafening rage will overwhelm you.

In these days where our bodies, our color, our identity, and our lives are being exploited, we clearly express our demands and insist on their fulfillment. We continue to resist until our rights are recognized. We will hold you accountable. We will NOT TURN BACK from our rights, our existence, and our freedom. We will not allow everything related to the rainbow to be treated as a criminal offense. We will continue to stand up for the rainbow; we don't want to lose one more person.



We declare that we do not accept the ongoing policies of the patriarchal state that segregate and target the LGBTI+ community, and we reject the verbal and physical violence that is strategically and systematically implemented. We oppose divisive policies and do not acknowledge your baseless allegations and hate campaigns. We have always been here, we are here, and we will remain here. You will be the ones to leave.

Some on the streets, some going to çark, some in front of their homes, some on the roads, some by their partners' side, some by their families' side... We remember all our lost friends, each leaving a separate trace in our hearts. We will not forget the resistance of our friends who were lost to the hands of the state: Zirve Soylu, Hande Buse Şeker, Palmiye Deniz, Dilek İnce, Eylül Cansın, Rojin Çiçek, Ahmet Yıldız, and countless others whose names we couldn't mention. We turn to the streets, engulfing those who don't provide water to our fire.

Once again, hand in hand, we RETURN from Meydan to Tünel. With solidarity, with struggle, we RETURN to the streets that we glorify every year, the spaces that belong to us. We gather in the 31st Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week.

We shout, we protest. And we say: WE ARE RETURNING!

*AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

Çark: To cruise