

TURKEY

DEFENDERS AND THEIR TRAINERS MUST BE RELEASED

Eight human rights defenders, including Amnesty International's Turkey Director İdil Eser, and two international IT trainers, were detained by police on 5 July as they were participating in a workshop in Istanbul. They must be released immediately and unconditionally as they are prisoners of conscience.



Eight human rights defenders, including Amnesty International's Turkey Director İdil Eser (pictured at left), and two IT trainers from Germany and Sweden, were detained by police on 5 July at around 10am as they were participating in a workshop in a hotel in Büyükdada, Istanbul.

The eight human rights defenders are **Günel Kurşun** (lawyer, Human Rights Agenda Association), **İdil Eser** (Amnesty International Turkey), **İlknur Üstün** (Women's Coalition), **Nalan Erkem** (lawyer, Citizens Assembly), **Nejat Taştan** (Equal Rights Watch Association), **Özlem Dalkıran** (Citizens' Assembly), **Şeyhmuz Özbekli** (lawyer), **Veli Acu** (Human Rights Agenda Association). The two trainers are **Peter Steudtner** and **Ali Gharavi**.

The ten were detained incommunicado and not allowed to inform any family members of their detention for 28 hours, in breach of Turkey's law. They were also denied access to lawyers for more than 24 hours, also in contravention of Turkey's law. On the evening of 5 July, NGOs discovered the location where they were being held on Büyükdada Island. The authorities transferred the eight human rights defenders later that evening, again refusing to confirm where they were being held, until around 3pm on 6 July.

Lawyers were then allowed to visit them at the four separate police detention facilities where they were being held. All 10 individuals are being held on suspicion of "membership of an armed terrorist organization". On this basis their detention has been authorized for seven days, and could be extended for a further seven without being brought before a court.

Amnesty International considers their detention arbitrary and the fact they are being questioned on suspicion of "membership of an armed terrorist organization" baseless and ludicrous. They are prisoners of conscience.

Please send a fax, email or letter without delay. (Postage is \$2.50.)

* Urge the Minister of Justice to immediately and unconditionally release human rights defenders Günal Kurşun, İdil Eser, İlknur Üstün, Nalan Erkem, Nejat Taştan, Özlem Dalkıran, Şeyhmuz Özbekli, Veli Acu and the two IT international trainers Ali Gharavi and Peter Steudtner.

Here is the contact information you need:

Mr Bekir Bozdağ
Ministry of Justice
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06659 Ankara, Turkey
Fax: 011 90 312 419 3370
Email: ozelkalem@adalet.gov.tr
Salutation: Dear Minister

Please send a copy to

His Excellency Selçuk Ünal
Ambassador for Turkey
197 Wurtemberg Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8L9
Fax: (613) 789-3442
E-mail: embassy.ottawa@mfa.gov.tr

Additional information

The detention of these human rights defenders, and the two IT trainers participating in the workshop, takes place in the context of an escalating crackdown on human rights by the Turkish authorities, following a failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016. At least 50,000 people have been imprisoned pending trial and more than 100,000 public sector employees have been summarily dismissed. The authorities have targeted critical voices in the media and civil society. At least 130 journalists and media workers have been detained since the attempted coup, and hundreds of media outlets and NGOs have been shut down.

Only a month earlier, on 6 June 2017, Taner Kılıç, a prominent human rights defender and the Chair of Amnesty International Turkey was detained and wrongly accused of membership of the “Fethullahist Terrorist Organization”. On 9 June, he was remanded in pre-trial prison detention. Amnesty International is calling for the charges against him to be dropped and for his immediate and unconditional release. See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR44/6475/2017/en/>

Amnesty International has called on the Turkish authorities to cease their assault on freedom of expression and dissident voices, and allow media and civil society workers to carry out their legitimate work in peace and without fear of reprisal.

Arbitrary detention is prohibited under international law. The right not to be arbitrarily detained has been codified in Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Turkey has ratified. The notion of “arbitrariness” includes elements of inappropriateness, injustice, lack of predictability and due process of law, as well as elements of reasonableness, necessity, and proportionality.